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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

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APPLYING TWELVE STEP PRINCIPLES OF RECOVERY
IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION GROUPS AT JUPITER FIRST CHURCH

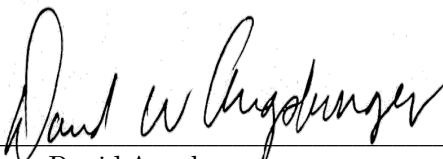
Written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:


David Augsburg


Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: July 29, 2014

APPLYING TWELVE STEP PRINCIPLES OF RECOVERY
IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION GROUPS AT JUPITER FIRST CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

DEBORAH KAISER-CROSS
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ABSTRACT

Applying Twelve Step Principles of Recovery in Spiritual Formation Groups at Jupiter First Church

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School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2014

The purpose of this ministry focus paper is to implement a small-group program utilizing a Twelve Step model of spiritual formation at Jupiter First Church to empower adults to experience increased wholeness of mind, body, and spirit, through growth in relationships with God, self, and others. Jupiter First Church is located in Jupiter, Florida, which has experienced rapid population shifts, contributing to a fragmented sense of community. Many in the congregation are familiar with the Twelve Steps as a vehicle for recovery from addiction, but not as a means of spiritual formation. To address this issue, a pilot project will present a Christ-centered spiritual formation process based on the Twelve Steps, including Bible study, spiritual disciplines, and sharing of personal stories to foster community in small groups.

This paper is divided into three sections. Part One contextualizes Jupiter First Church, assessing the community and distinctive character of the congregation. Particular attention is paid to community demographics, review of area Twelve Step opportunities, and current practices of spiritual formation in the church, in order to address both the ministry challenge and opportunities provided for this congregation.

Part Two explores the theological and biblical rationale for the initiative. A review of this congregation's theological foundation guides the development of this project. An exploration of the biblical constructs of *shalom* and spiritual formation as the pursuit of human wholeness serves to undergird this initiative.

Emerging from this reflection, Part Three centers on the creation of the blueprint for this ministry initiative. This section identifies the goals and strategy for this plan of providing participants with opportunities for engagement in small groups designed to foster both community and spiritual growth toward wholeness. This section concludes with an evaluation of the project and offers insight for future initiatives.

Content Reader: David Augsburg, Ph.D.
Word Count: 291

To my fellow travelers at Jupiter First Church
who make ministry a joy and a delight
To my husband, David
for your daily love, encouragement, and listening ear,
I would not have made it to this day without your belief in me
To the children of my heart, Anne, Chad, Sarah, and Michael,
who lovingly pushed and pulled me to complete this journey
And to my dear friend and partner in this project, Lynn Hughes,
who offered her expertise, creativity, and enthusiasm and
became my cheerleader throughout every part of this project

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INTRODUCTION

Jupiter is a beautiful seaside community nestled along the Atlantic coastline. Once a sleepy tourist town, Jupiter is now a growing suburban community, as the metropolitan sprawl of south Florida has continued its northward migration. Many who now call Jupiter home have relocated from other areas of Florida and the United States, as well as, other countries. Many have come to pursue new job opportunities, a more relaxed lifestyle, or a retirement community in a tropical setting.

Jupiter First Church was planted thirty years ago by a visionary young pastor with financial support from the Board of Homeland Ministries for the United Church of Christ. It is currently a congregation of approximately two thousand adults, with a staff of six pastors and many program directors who oversee a wide variety of ministries offered for various ages, life stages and specific needs. Currently, the congregation has a stable base of membership, a solid financial foundation, and a generally positive outlook about its future in the community. The congregation is intergenerational by design, working to integrate persons at different life stages into one congregation.

The growth of the community of Jupiter has resulted in a steady stream of visitors to Jupiter First Church. Many who have made Jupiter First Church their home came from diverse religious backgrounds. Some undoubtedly would use the popular phrase “I am spiritual but not religious” to describe themselves. Still others are looking for a congregation that is biblically grounded yet progressive. This congregation welcomes honest theological inquiry and intellectual curiosity, providing many opportunities for

persons to explore their faith. Yet, Jupiter First is also unabashedly Christ-centered, regularly inviting persons into a life changing relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

In any given week, approximately four hundred adults are involved in classes and seminars focused on emotional, physical, intellectual, and/or spiritual growth. Adult education courses are popular at Jupiter First Church. Some are short-term lasting only six to twelve weeks. Still others span twenty to thirty-five sessions. They are often filled to capacity, resulting in waiting lists due to the lack of available physical space. Many courses attract those who want to focus on in-depth Bible study, others appeal to those who are seeking personal development; still others are for those who desire growth that addresses the intersection of the spiritual and psychological realms. All classes are designed to foster an environment of curiosity, authenticity, belonging, and community for participants. Jupiter First Church prides itself on being an open, growing, inclusive, and welcoming congregation in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

One recent event catapulted me into an evaluation of the spiritual formation opportunities offered at Jupiter First Church and, as a result, a proposal of this new ministry initiative. On December 31, 2011, the long serving, highly respected executive minister at Jupiter First Church made a phone call to the senior minister to set up a meeting for that afternoon. There, he communicated that he was an alcoholic and that he was in need of treatment. In January 2012, he entered into a ninety-day residential treatment program in another state. This was communicated to the congregation through a letter from the senior minister and the Church Council describing the situation, supporting what they regarded as “a courageous decision,” and soliciting the prayers of the congregation during that difficult time. That event set into motion numerous changes

within the congregation over the following two years. I know this personally because I have served in this church as the minister of congregational care for the past twenty-two years and have been married to the executive minister for thirty-two years.

I came to the Twelve Step recovery process many years after I had begun my own journey of spiritual formation and discipleship as a Christian. While I had a healthy respect for the Twelve Steps and for their positive impact on many people I knew in recovery, I had no experiential knowledge of them myself. When my husband entered treatment, I was propelled into a spotlight that I did not seek and a journey of spiritual discovery I did not choose. Yet, these curious circumstances created the rich environment for my own recovery and spurred on new spiritual growth in me.

The Twelve Steps have provided a springboard for renewed spirituality as I have combined them with the traditional Christian disciplines that have been a consistent part of my daily spiritual practice. As I began to practice the Twelve Steps personally, I began to recognize that they are very much the story of the Christian spiritual formation process. The combination of the Twelve Steps and classical spiritual practices has been simply transformational in my own life. As a result of my own personal growth and in my role as minister of congregational care, I began to ponder ways of integrating Twelve Step recovery with traditional Christian spiritual formation practices in the adult education programs of Jupiter First Church.

In the Fall/Winter 2010 issue of *Conversations*, Jan Johnson penned a thought-provoking article about the Church and the Twelve Steps. In it, she wrote, albeit reluctantly: “Every church lobby should have a sign that says, ‘Go downstairs for change; stay upstairs to stay the same.’ While real change happens in Twelve Step programs,

there seems to be a lack of change happening in the sanctuary.”¹ Several factors seem to contribute to this unfortunate situation. Having experienced both spiritual formation groups in the local church and the working out of the Twelve Steps in the “rooms of recovery,” I have sadly witnessed the truth of Johnson’s assertion. The Church has sometimes been accused of holding up a picture of spiritual perfection that is unattainable for believers to achieve. This has often led to a lack of emotional and spiritual honesty about real life struggles for those in the Church, because of the sensed expectation to present a perfect Christian image to the larger community.

On the other hand, those in Twelve Step recovery appear to hold up a different set of embodied values that create a more honest environment for its members. Keith Miller asserts: “The simple yet profoundly spiritual model that is hidden within the Twelve Steps has caused these groups collectively to become perhaps the fastest-growing spiritual movement in America today.”² Certain principles that invite authenticity and acceptance seem to guide most Twelve Step meetings. First, participants are asked to be honest, open, and willing to engage in the recovery process.³ Additionally, perfection is not the expected outcome for anyone in recovery. Of utmost importance is one of its oft-repeated maxims: “The goal is progress, not perfection.”⁴ This echoes the apostle Paul’s words: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already reached the goal; but I

¹ Jan Johnson, “Intentionality of the Heart: Willing to Change,” *Conversations Journal* 8.2 (Fall/Winter 2010): 59.

² J. Keith Miller, *A Hunger for Healing* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), xv.

³ Alcoholics Anonymous, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1995), 59.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil 3:12).”⁵

Another significant value is the protection of the anonymity of all members of the group, thus creating an atmosphere of emotional safety. Finally, an environment of acceptance permeates Twelve Step meetings, with critical judgment of self or others intentionally withheld. The combination of those factors contributes to a culture that encourages recovery. On the exponential growth in recovery groups, Miller declares: “I believe this growth is occurring because the Twelve Steps bring biblical principles of faith to bear on the pain of contemporary people in a way that leads sufferers into a close living relationship with God frees them to live a meaningful life seeking God’s will.”⁶

Johnson asserts: “This safe, authentic, purposeful community (recovery community) has a lot of implications for spiritual formation. While formation is actually caught, spiritual formation programs are mostly taught.”⁷ Twelve Step programs understand this distinction. Spiritual growth occurs, not so much through a didactic process, but in the experiential day-by-day practice of living out of these principles. Dale and Juanita Ryan echo the correlation between the Twelve Steps and the spiritual growth process: “The Twelve Steps are best known of course, as a collection of spiritual disciplines that have been helpful to people recovering from addiction. Whether the addiction is to alcohol, drugs, work, food, sex, ‘fixing’ other people, or to anything else, the Twelve Steps offer the building blocks for a saner, freer, more grace-full way of

⁵ This project will be utilizing *The Holy Bible: New Revised Version* unless otherwise indicated.

⁶ Miller, *A Hunger for Healing*, xv.

⁷ Johnson, “Intentionality of the Heart,” 63.

life.”⁸ Those seeking spiritual growth at Jupiter First Church intuitively sense that a different kind of life is available than that offered by the culture around them. The Twelve Steps provide an experiential growth process that engages the body, the mind, and the spirit in daily spiritual disciplines that can become life changing for the participant.

Jupiter First Church has a strong base of members who are actively involved in Twelve Step recovery work for their own personal growth. Many of these persons are also actively involved in spiritual formation opportunities at Jupiter First Church. Many of these persons are recognized for their spiritual maturity, wisdom, and leadership. They have expressed the desire to integrate their Christian faith with the growth they are experiencing through practicing the Twelve Steps.

These observations and experiences have been the impetus for a consideration of a new ministry initiative at Jupiter First Church. This has led to an exploration of certain theological and practical questions: What is the theological foundation underpinning the Twelve Steps? How might that fit into a model of Christian spiritual formation for adults at Jupiter First Church? How can we utilize the best of the Twelve Step recovery movement and combine it with traditional Christian spiritual formation principles and practices in order to encourage a deeper sense of human wholeness? How can the church more effectively empower disciples to be conformed to the image of Christ and impact their worlds for him?

⁸ Dale Ryan and Juanita Ryan, *Spiritual Kindergarten: Christian Perspective on the Twelve Steps* (La Brea, CA: Christian Recovery International, 1999), 1.

Jupiter First Church faces a new ministry opportunity in the area of spiritual formation. While many formation groups exist, participants have expressed the desire for deepened spiritual growth that integrates the mind, body, and the spirit. Of import to those involved in Twelve Step recovery is the desire for formation groups that address the stubborn behaviors resistant to change. Many desire transformation into the image of Christ yet lack the tools to do that. The ministry challenge at Jupiter First Church is to provide a model for spiritual formation that empowers growth for those who seek a less fragmented, more integrated spirituality in a community setting.

These issues are the foundation of this ministry focus paper. The purpose of this ministry initiative is to encourage small groups of adults to practice the Twelve Steps, alongside corresponding spiritual disciplines and study of Scripture over a course of twenty weeks to empower them to experience increased wholeness in mind, body, and spirit through growth in relationships with God, with self, and with other people. The goal of this ministry initiative is to create a small-group community that models the Twelve Step principles of honesty, openness, and willingness as individuals seek to grow in Christ at Jupiter First Church.⁹ This ministry initiative needs to be contextually sound and theologically and biblically grounded, while providing a clear picture of the ministry goals and implementation strategies. Part One of this paper will explore the history of Jupiter First Church and its cultural and spiritual context within the community of Jupiter, Florida. Part Two will address the pertinent theological literature that will undergird this ministry project. A theological framework of human wholeness, its importance in the

⁹ Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001), 568.

spiritual formation process, and the role of the Twelve Steps as a pathway to human wholeness will be explored. Part Three will provide the specific plans, the implementation, and the evaluation of this ministry initiative at Jupiter First Church.

Robert Mulholland penned these words that mirror my prayer for the disciples who are members of the Body of Christ at Jupiter First Church:

The journey of faith, the path to spiritual wholeness, lies in our increasingly faithful response to the One whose purpose shapes our path, whose grace redeems our detours, whose power liberates us from the crippling bondage of our previous journey, and whose transforming presence meets us at each turn in our road. Holistic spirituality is a pilgrimage of deepening responsiveness to God's control of our life and being.¹⁰

It is my hope this ministry initiative will not only empower members of Jupiter First Church in their desire to be transformed in Christ, but also inspire other churches seeking a holistic model of spiritual formation.

¹⁰ M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 168.

PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT OF MINISTRY AT JUPITER FIRST CHURCH

In May 2013, *Coastal Living* proclaimed Jupiter as one of the “Happiest Seaside Towns” in the United States. Antonia Van Der Meer commented: “By ranking the top fifteen happiest communities, we draw attention to places where life is good and the beach is close by. These towns boast a blend of such criteria as sunny days, walkable neighborhoods, easy commute times, healthy beaches – plus that indescribable coastal vibe.”¹ This small seaside community prides itself in being both a tourist destination and a coveted place in which to live. Jupiter First Church is one part of this “Happiest Seaside Town” and the setting for this ministry initiative.

Early Settlers to the Present Day in Jupiter

Jupiter is rich in history with its earliest written records dating back to 1565.² When the Spanish first began exploration of the coast of Florida, they encountered a native tribe called the *Jaega*, who inhabited the area along the coast and the Jupiter Inlet.

¹ Coastal Angler Magazine, “Coastal Living Top 15 Happiest Seaside Towns,” Coastal Angler, <http://www.coastalanglermagazine/treasurecoast/2012/05/14/coastal-living-top-15-happiest-seaside-towns-announced-jupiter-florida-on-the-list.html> (accessed October 15, 2013).

² Town of Jupiter, “History Timeline,” Town of Jupiter, <http://www.jupiter.fl.us/index.aspx?NID=317.html> (accessed October 1, 2013).

However, the Jupiter area first came to the public's attention when, in 1696, Jonathon Dickinson was shipwrecked on the shores of Jupiter. In his journal, he chronicled in detail his struggles with the native population until he was able to leave the area.

In the 1800s, Jupiter's most identifiable landmark, the Jupiter Lighthouse, was constructed. The town of Jupiter was born as a military encampment for the United States Army as it engaged the Native American Seminole population in several battles prior to the Civil War. In the early part of the twentieth century, much of the area surrounding Palm Beach had been a haven for wealthy northerners seeking a respite from winter weather. Growers and ranchers who had several generations of roots in the area also occupied the region. However, after the war, a population shift began to occur, as the area quickly became an attraction for business and housing development.³

The town remained small through the 1950s, with a population of fewer than four hundred people. The post-war Baby Boom, the development of air conditioning, and the construction of an infrastructure of roads and utilities, led to further growth in the area. Northern speculators, such as John MacArthur, purchased much of the available land in Palm Beach County, which he later sold to developers. In 1958, Pratt and Whitney Corporation, an aerospace company, opened a manufacturing and testing plant on the outskirts of Jupiter, ultimately employing thousands and spurring the growth of related industries. Many longtime residents recall sitting on their back porches in the late evening during those years listening to the sounds of wetland creatures alongside the rumble of jet engines being tested a few short miles away.

³ Ibid.

An Uneasy Truce: Community in Transition

These combined factors accelerated the influx of many northerners relocating to the community. Lured by the absence of a state income tax and pleasant winters, many people discovered Jupiter to be the ideal place for a second home. Many have established a six-month plus one day residency in the area, in order to qualify for Florida tax rates.

During the 1980s and 1990s, a period of rapid development ensued with businesses and individuals seeking to permanently settle in the area. During those years, it was becoming evident that forces promoting development were beginning to spar with those who sought the solace of the relaxed coastal community they had once taken for granted. During each election, pro-development forces seemed to clash with those seeking to slow the tide of growth. And for many, the hope for a sense of community diminished with every new development and building permit issued.

Community Attractions

Jupiter celebrates a large number of community attractions. The town is unique in Palm Beach County in its sheer number of beaches open to the public. Before development exploded in the area, the Jupiter town council members were prescient in acquiring several miles of property along the Atlantic Ocean, designating the coastal waterfront areas as public access beaches. For approximately three miles, all housing developments have been planned for the opposite side of Beach Road, thereby preserving the beaches as a refuge for all, not just for condominium property owners. To support public use, numerous free parking spots line the road. Saturday mornings invite a host of walkers, joggers, and cyclists enjoying the coastal ambience and the tropical weather.

Families plan get-togethers and sports teams gather for celebrations in the beach pavilions provided at no cost by the town. Designated pet-friendly beaches are regularly patrolled and cleaned by a volunteer group named “Friends of Jupiter Beach.”

In addition to the beaches, the Jupiter area claims Jonathon Dickinson State Park as well as numerous historical sites, including the Jupiter Lighthouse as tourist attractions. The St. Louis Cardinals and the Florida Marlins make Jupiter’s Roger Dean Stadium their spring training home, which attracts thousands of visitors every year.⁴ The public schools, which are administered by the Palm Beach County School Board, are “A” rated by the state of Florida.⁵ The result is that steady streams of parents seeking the best quality education for their children choose to make Jupiter their home.

A Community of Affluence and Fragmentation

From a small seaside village to a growing suburb, the population of Jupiter reached 55,156 persons according to the U.S. Census data of 2010, up 40 percent from 2000.⁶ Male and female genders are equally divided. White persons make up 90 percent of the population, with small percentages of African American, Asian, Native American, and persons reporting more than one race making up the remainder of the population. Of those numbers, approximately 13 percent of the sample self-identify as Hispanic or

⁴ Roger Dean Stadium, “About Roger Dean Stadium,” <http://www.rogerdeanstadium.com.html> (accessed November 4, 2013).

⁵ Palm Beach County Schools, “School Grades,” Palm Beach County School Board, http://www.palmbeachschools.org/Community/PDFs/grades_schools_2013.pdf (accessed November 1, 2013).

⁶ Census Viewer Facts, “Jupiter Florida Population: Census 2012 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts,” <http://www.censusviewer.com/city/FL/jupiter> (accessed November 5, 2013).

Latino (of any race.) Median household income is approximately \$66,370, which is significantly higher than the median household income for the state (\$47,827). However, there are pockets of the population (8.5 percent) who live below the poverty level. This is in marked comparison to the state average of 14.7 percent who reside in poverty. On the surface it seems, Jupiter is an affluent community.⁷

Retirees to Young Families

The 2010 census data indicates that Jupiter's population of persons younger than eighteen years of age is 19 percent, while persons 65 years and older is almost equal to that number at 20 percent.⁸ This split is evident in the community itself, with many retirees living alongside families with children residing at home. It is difficult to access the records that might indicate the percentage of the population that identify themselves as seasonal residents or "snowbirds." However, a review of the worship statistics at Jupiter First Church shows a significant increase in attendance from November to April each year. Summer worship attendance stands at approximately six hundred adults while January attendance runs about 1200 per Sunday. This swell in attendance comes from the many who call Jupiter their winter home.

Gated Communities to Front Porch Neighborhoods

The housing in Jupiter reveals a vast array of options. Some neighborhoods attempt to replicate Midwestern hospitality, with expansive front porches adjacent to the

⁷ Census Data for Jupiter, Florida, "33458 Zip Code Detailed Profile," Quick Facts, <http://www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12/1235875.html> (accessed July 2, 2013).

⁸ Census Viewer Facts, "Jupiter Florida Population: Census 2012 and 2000 Interactive Map.

sidewalks that link the close knit family-oriented communities. Other housing developments boast massive landscape barriers that serve as gated security checkpoints. Some communities have homeowner's associations that carefully monitor the rules of the community. Still others have loosely organized neighborhood groups that host seasonal gatherings for its residents. Many condominium and townhouse communities are designed to appeal to senior adults. Portions of "Old Jupiter" still exist, with modest, carefully maintained but expensive homes, mainly on the extensive system of waterways that lead to the ocean. Condominiums line much of the narrow channel separating Jupiter Island and the mainland. These residences serve as the seasonal homes of those who are referred to as snowbirds. However, the vast majority of people are year-round residents with a variety of economic means and occupations.

Educational Backgrounds of Residents

In the group of those twenty-five years and older, 92 percent of the population has achieved a high school or higher education. Approximately 42 percent hold at least a bachelor's degree, and 12 percent have earned graduate or professional degrees.⁹ That is significantly above the Florida average in all categories.

Job Sector Shift

According to the data provided by the 2010 U.S. Census, the most common industries in which persons are employed in Jupiter are construction (14 percent), retail trade (13 percent), administrative and support and waste management services (8 percent), professional, scientific, and technical services (8 percent), manufacturing (8

⁹ City Data for Jupiter, Florida, "33458 Zip Code Detailed Profile."

percent), accommodation and food services (7 percent), and finance and insurance (7 percent).¹⁰ These percentages reflect the diversity of occupations in the area with a wide distribution of “blue collar” and “white collar” jobs. While there is no hard data to confirm this, informal discussions among church members have revealed a large number of persons who work from their homes or who telecommute. The four largest employers in Palm Beach County are the Palm Beach County School District, Palm Beach County, Tenet Health Care, and Next Era Energy.¹¹ These employers retain many of the members of Jupiter First Church. While a shift has been occurring in Northern Palm Beach County toward additional professional and technical jobs, a large number of residents still rely on jobs in construction, food services, and tourism-related industries.

One of the key factors in the job sector shift in Jupiter in recent years has been the active recruitment of businesses, educational institutions, and spring training baseball to this community. The John D. MacArthur Campus of Florida Atlantic University is located in Jupiter, providing both undergraduate and graduate education. A sustained effort by business and government leaders over the last twenty years has led to the expansion of two bio-technology institutions to Jupiter: The Scripps Research Institute of Florida¹² and The Max Planck Florida Institute which focuses on neuroscience research.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Business Development Board of Palm Beach County, “Palm Beach County Top 100 Employers,” Business Development Board, http://www.bdb.org/clientuploads/Research/0_2011_Data/Topemployers_2011_fl.pdf (accessed November 1, 2013).

¹² Scripps Research Institute of Florida. “Facts at a Glance and Frequently Asked Questions,” Scripps Florida, <http://www.scripps.edu/florida/about/facts.html> (accessed November 5, 2013).

¹³ Max Planck Florida Institute. “Max Planck Florida Institute for Neuroscience,” Max Planck Florida, <http://www.maxplanckflorida.org> (accessed November 5, 2013).

With the construction of their respective headquarters, additional professional jobs have been created over the past few years.

The population shifts in Jupiter reveal a large number of persons who have relocated from other regions of the state and country.¹⁴ Many of those transplants are seeking to make their home in this community, pursuing opportunities for connection. Many are detached from their family and support networks and are actively pursuing a place to call home. This often leads them to seek out a church community.

The Story of Jupiter First Church

The United Church of Christ established Jupiter First Church as a church plant in late 1982. A young dynamic minister was chosen as the founding pastor to settle in this rapidly growing south Florida suburb with his family. By March 1983, through newspaper ads and old-fashioned knocking on doors in family-centered neighborhoods, this entrepreneurial pastor had attracted enough interest to hold an inaugural worship service overlooking the ocean in the penthouse of the Jupiter Beach Resort. The fledgling congregation quickly outgrew its original space and moved to two other temporary locations until it was able to purchase ten acres of land on which to build its initial facilities. The first sanctuary and education building was completed in 1987, four years after the church's inception. The church continued to grow numerically, tripling in size in another three years. It was at that time that the church invited a second pastor to join the staff as executive minister. Several years later, I joined the staff as minister of congregational care. While it was not obvious at the time, the church was beginning to

¹⁴ City Data for Jupiter, Florida. "33458 Zip Code Detailed Profile."

struggle financially and the founding pastor was on the edge of emotional and spiritual burnout, while struggling with a hidden alcohol addiction.

New Church Start to Abrupt Leadership Transition

Nine months after the second minister's arrival, the founding pastor abruptly resigned and moved, leaving his family and the congregation in turmoil. Membership, attendance, and financial support fell dramatically during this period. Two years of conflict followed with the church ostensibly divided over "contemporary" versus "traditional" music styles. Yet, this outward turmoil seemed to be rooted in the mistrust engendered by the rumors surrounding the founding pastor's behaviors and his sudden departure. As the church was and is still governed by congregational polity, an annual meeting was held to decide the future direction of the church. The church members decided by a split vote to move into a more contemporary form of worship. When this decision was made, it led to a division within the congregation which resulted in the loss of about half of its membership. A period of instability followed until a senior minister was called to lead this congregation into the future. The church's second senior minister began his pastorate in 1993 and continues to serve the congregation today.

Stabilization to the Present Setting

After a rebuilding period, the church began to stabilize and grow with strong preaching, a booming children's ministry, and a vibrant preschool. Shortly after, a gifted minister of music was called, and the music program blossomed into a dynamic part of this congregation's ministry. A solid youth ministry began to develop which increased the number of families with children in the congregation. Another building program was

completed in 2005, adding a larger sanctuary, offices, and a center for adult education. At that time, the church added a part-time family ministries director, a full-time children's ministries director, and a part-time senior ministries director.

In January 2011, the executive minister, who had served the congregation for twenty years in that role, sought treatment for his own alcohol addiction. The senior minister, the leadership team, and the administrative board of the congregation fully supported him and his family during the following ninety days of inpatient treatment. Because of the length of his treatment program, a decision was made by all concerned to be honest and open about what was occurring. All church members received a letter acknowledging the situation and soliciting the prayers and support of the congregation. The executive minister returned to his position, with agreed-upon adjustments to his job description, when he completed his treatment program. The result of this situation was an increased awareness of, and sensitivity to, those in the congregation and surrounding community who were struggling with addictions.

Overview of Jupiter First Church Today

By comparative standards, Jupiter First Church is a large congregation, with approximately two thousand adult members. It is a multi-staff church with five full-time ministers and one part-time ministry intern, twenty-four program and support staff, and twenty full-time and part-time teachers administering and staffing the preschool, as well as many strong program ministries. The congregation is financially stable even in the midst of a recently challenging economy, and is growing numerically each year, although at a much slower rate than in the past. The majority of its members are over forty-five

years of age. However, there has been some recent growth in the area of family ministry as a result of leadership targeted toward this group. Up until the past two years, most of the program and ministry staff members have been between the ages of fifty and sixty-five and their average tenure in those positions has been approximately fifteen years. The staff ages have been reflective of the congregation.

During the period of the executive minister's treatment, the senior minister engaged a consultant to evaluate the congregational life, the staff, and the ministries of Jupiter First Church. As a result of that report, some changes have evolved. This has included the expansion of the director of senior ministries to a full-time position, the calling of a full-time family ministries pastor, and the addition of a ministry intern, whose work has included congregational care and co-leadership in development of an intentional recovery ministry specifically targeted to this community of faith. At the present time, the church is continuing a re-evaluation process in light of the anticipated retirement of the long-term senior pastor, the shifting landscape of the community of Jupiter, and the impact of those factors on the future of the congregation.

Jupiter First Church Community Influence

Jupiter First Church is located at what is sometimes referred to as "Faith Corner," as a fast-growing Reform synagogue and an active Catholic congregation share the same two blocks of Indian Creek Parkway. The percentage of the population affiliated with a religious congregation in Jupiter is 56 percent, which is significantly higher than the statistics for the United States as a whole (50 percent).¹⁵ Of those affiliated with a

¹⁵ City Data for Jupiter, Florida, "33458 Zip Code Detailed Profile."

religious congregation, Jupiter's Roman Catholic population stands at 47 percent, other Christian groups number 27 percent, and its Jewish population is 26 percent of the population.¹⁶

Jupiter First Church is the largest Protestant congregation in Jupiter, but often lives in the shadow of a mega-church located in the next community. However, as a larger congregation, it has the resources to provide an array of ministry, mission, and educational opportunities. A lull in development during the recession led to slower church growth. This trend has begun to shift with a resurgence of new construction, and new residential communities springing up around the church. With that, comes new residents, often transplants from other areas. Any given Sunday brings numerous visitors who have just moved to the Jupiter community who are searching for a place that they might call their church home. New member's classes are full of new residents seeking stability, new connections, and spiritual nurture. A fairly typical response to the question: "What led you to Jupiter First Church?" is "We were looking for a church home – and found ourselves welcomed here." At the present moment, Jupiter First is assessing the future needs of the congregation for young families, children, and youth ministries.

Jupiter First Church and Spiritual Formation

Over the past several years, the staff and ministers at Jupiter First Church have taken the initiative to develop a broad spiritual formation program for adults seeking growth in mind, body, and spirit. An overview of the church's website points a newcomer to the myriad of offerings available for those seeking holistic growth: Christian yoga,

¹⁶ Ibid.

prayer walking, Disciple Bible studies, short-term Bible studies, personal growth classes, and regular retreats and seminars.¹⁷ What links them all is an intentionality of focus on offerings that link the mind, body, and spirit in Christian formation. This congregation seeks to provide opportunities for those who are hungry for a practical spirituality that allows them to grow deeper in a relationship with God, with self, and with other human beings. This ministry project takes another step on that journey.

The Theological Character of Jupiter First Church

Jupiter First Church is a product of both its Congregational and its United Church of Christ heritages. Launched by the UCC as a proud new church start, the congregation enjoyed a strong connection to its parent denomination. It was heralded as one of the fastest growing and most successful church plants of that era. However, the abrupt departure of the founding pastor led to a period of transition marked by conflict and miscommunication with the denomination. This has resulted in an uneasy relationship that continues to the present day. At this time, this faith community operates with congregational polity, ostensibly as an independent and autonomous congregation. However at the same time, Jupiter First Church holds dual loose affiliations with the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (NACCC) and the UCC. While the congregation's roots are in the UCC, the current membership is drawn from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds.

¹⁷ Jupiter First Church, "About Jupiter First Church," <http://www.jupiterfirstchurch.org/home> (accessed November 1, 2013).

Theological Flavor

Theologically, Jupiter First Church emphasizes the goodness and grace of God, with an encouragement for all to seek the ever-open door to a life-transforming relationship with God through Jesus Christ. If the church claims any motto, it would be “God is good, all the time.” Another oft-repeated expression is “God loves you more than you can mess up.”¹⁸ These affirmations remind members and visitors that God is for them and that God’s welcome to them is extravagant.

The congregation is intentionally inclusive, yet undeniably Christ-centered. The worship is both contemporary and traditional, meaning that the music on any given Sunday will most likely include a familiar hymn, a contemporary praise song heard on Christian radio, and a popular song that carries the theme of the morning. While the congregation repeats the Lord’s Prayer each week, creeds and responsive readings are not recited. There is a clear communication that Christians can embrace different political viewpoints, and varying opinions on hot-button social issues and still be welcomed into this community of faith. The communion table is open to all who seek a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is communicated every time Jupiter First Church gathers for the Lord’s Supper.

Impact of the “Walk to Emmaus” Retreat Movement

A word needs to be added about the impact of this “Walk to Emmaus” community on the congregation. This inter-denominational retreat movement administered by the

¹⁸ Barry Johnson, senior minister at Jupiter First Church often repeats these phrases in the worship service.

Upper Room,¹⁹ and modeled on the Cursillo Movement²⁰ in the Catholic Church, is designed to develop leadership in the local church. This is done by communicating a theology of grace to participants over the course of a weekend, and by encouraging those who have experienced that grace to pass it on in word and in action. Over the course of the last twenty years, over three hundred adults and youth from Jupiter First Church have attended and served on these weekends. This leadership development has produced a cadre of committed disciples who provide the bulk of spiritual leadership at Jupiter First Church. In their own process of discipleship, they seek out authentic spiritual formation opportunities to continue their personal journeys of faith.

Of special importance to this ministry project is the intersection of spiritual formation concepts with Twelve Step recovery principles. While Jupiter First Church provides strong spiritual formation opportunities for its members, it has not offered small group classes that combine spiritual formation with the Twelve Steps to aid the spiritual development process. A necessary review of the landscape of substance abuse treatment and recovery in this community will set the scene for further discussion of this ministry initiative.

Substance Abuse and Treatment in Palm Beach County

Disembarking passengers at Palm Beach International Airport often comment on the numerous advertisements for substance abuse treatment centers lining the arrival corridor on the way to baggage claim. People working in the recovery community

¹⁹ Walk to Emmaus, “About Walk to Emmaus.” Emmaus Upper Room, <http://emmaus.upperroom.org/about> (accessed 11-5-13).

²⁰ National Cursillo Center, “What is Cursillo.” The Cursillo Movement, <http://www.cursillo.org/whatis.html> (accessed 11-13-13).

sometimes refer to Palm Beach County as a “Treatment Center Mecca.” The common assumption among those working in substance abuse circles is that South Florida has an inordinately high number of inpatient programs, outpatient treatment facilities, sober houses, and Twelve Step programs. A review of the data suggests that the perception may be correct. Although comparative statistics on the numbers of persons in treatment *per capita* are difficult to access, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) provides a listing of approved facilities in every region of the country. A search of treatment centers within a fifty-mile radius of Jupiter First Church shows fifty-two centers approved for Detox, Inpatient Services, Intensive Outpatient Programs, Partial Hospitalization Programs, or Day Treatment. This does not include the numerous halfway houses or Sober Living congregate living facilities.²¹ Nor does this take into consideration the forty-five AlAnon and Alateen meetings within a twenty-five mile radius²² or the several hundred AA meetings within Palm Beach County alone.²³

Area Congregations with Recovery Ministry

A review of the websites of area churches and telephone inquiries of Jupiter churches reveals that few churches have an active Christ-centered recovery ministry. However, many churches in the area host AA, AlAnon, Adult Children of Alcoholics groups, and other Twelve Step recovery groups. One mega-church in the next town hosts

²¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), “Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator,” <http://www.samhsa.gov/TreatmentLocator/faces/searchresults.jspx> (accessed October 18, 2013).

²² Al Anon Family Groups, “Palm Beach County Al Anon Meetings,” <http://www.palmbeachafg.org/160-169%20meeting%20list.pdf> (accessed November 5, 2013).

²³ Alcoholics Anonymous, “Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings in Palm Beach County,” <http://www.aa-palmbeachcounty.org/meetings.html> (accessed November 5, 2013).

several small groups during each week utilizing a recovery model of transformation. Two congregations, one eight miles away and the other, fifteen miles away, provide “Celebrate Recovery” ministries.²⁴ Begun at Saddleback Church, Celebrate Recovery is perhaps the largest and most widely known Christ-centered Twelve Step program in the country. Based on the Beatitudes and the Twelve Steps, this model combines personal testimony, biblical witness, and worship alongside small group programs for those seeking recovery.²⁵

Critical Mass of Persons in Recovery in this Congregation

During the fall of 2012, a brief announcement in the Sunday bulletin at Jupiter First Church invited interested persons to a meeting about beginning a recovery ministry at Jupiter First Church. The organizers were surprised to discover over forty persons at the initial meeting, with many more indicating that they might be interested in participating in any programs offered at the church in the future. Also surprising to the planners was the number of persons in attendance who indicated that they worked in the field of recovery as therapists or administrators. As the persons in that meeting shared their own stories, a common theme emerged. Many were interested in programs uniquely geared to the needs of Jupiter First members that integrated their own Christian faith with recovery. Most in that initial meeting had been involved in or are currently involved in secular Twelve Step programs. Interestingly enough, the persons interested in

²⁴ Celebrate Recovery, “About Celebrate Recovery,” <http://www.celebraterecovery.com> (accessed October 15, 2013).

²⁵ Ibid.

establishing recovery ministries in this congregation are also the same ones who are actively involved in spiritual formation classes offered at the church.

Jupiter First Church and Recovery Ministry

Over the years since its establishment, Jupiter First Church has periodically hosted AA and AlAnon meetings in its facilities. However, while the church has always championed Twelve Step recovery programs, there has been no active presence of programs on the church campus in recent years. That began to shift after the Fall 2012 meeting, when a select task force was chosen. The team began meeting to assess the needs for a recovery ministry and to create a program unique to the needs of Jupiter First Church. During this evaluation process, the establishment of a Celebrate Recovery program was considered.²⁶ However, it was discarded as an unviable option because its style was deemed to be more evangelistic than this church is comfortable supporting. The team also considered beginning to host AA and AlAnon meetings, but sensed that the need for additional area meetings was limited.

Of interest to the focus of this ministry initiative is the continuing challenge to address the concerns of those in the congregation and community who are seeking spiritual growth through a “Life Recovery” model of spiritual development. The concept of Life Recovery has evolved to refer to the working of the Twelve Steps to address any problematic life pattern in order to find help and healing. The term has been popularized

²⁶ Ibid.

by the publication of *The Life Recovery Bible New Testament* in 2002.²⁷ The team researched available Bible studies that might introduce a Life Recovery concept of Twelve Step recovery. Ultimately, the team decided that a Christ-centered model of recovery was the preferred future for Jupiter First Church. A small book by Dale and Juanita Ryan, entitled *Spiritual Kindergarten* was chosen and launched as a thirteen-week Bible study in January 2013.²⁸ Sixty persons chose to participate in the launch of this study. When this study was completed, weekly recovery meetings followed, and continue to run today.

The leadership team for Jupiter First Church Recovery Ministry began to discuss a way of combining experiences of spiritual formation with a Twelve Step model of recovery. A decision to integrate Christ-centered recovery with spiritual formation in a small group setting led to this ministry initiative. The leadership team began the process of developing a curriculum that combines the Twelve Steps, traditional Christian spiritual disciplines, and Bible study to create an experiential small group study. With the context for this ministry initiative established, it will be necessary to turn to a review of the literature to set the theological foundation for this project.

²⁷ Steven Arterburn, *Life Recovery New Testament and Psalms* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2002).

²⁸ Ryan and Ryan. *Spiritual Kindergarten*.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As this project has unfolded, several books have provided valuable background information and a theological foundation for this ministry initiative. This chapter provides a sampling of some of the significant books that have undergirded the project. The thesis of this project asserts that spiritual formation in the Christian tradition encompasses a broad understanding of transformation that rests on a theology of human wholeness. This section will explore the concept of spiritual formation as the movement toward wholeness of mind, body, and spirit. This wholeness is enhanced through growth in relationships with God, with self, and with other people. Each author's contribution to an enhanced understanding of this thesis will be evaluated, and the areas of limitation where noted, will be acknowledged.

Invitation to a Journey by M. Robert Mulholland

In the prologue to this book, Mulholland asserts: "In the face of a radical loss of meaning, value, and purpose engendered by a largely materialistic, hedonistic, consumer society, human hearts are hungering for deeper realities in which their fragmented lives can find some measure of wholeness and integrity, deeper experiences with God through

which their troubled lives can find meaning, value, purpose, and identity.”¹ Mulholland identifies the disorientation and fragmentation that appear to be a part of the human condition, especially with reference to persons living in an affluent culture. In this book, the author seeks to present a holistic understanding of the nature of Christian spiritual formation, rooted in Scripture, informed by personality theory, and guided by centuries of Christian spiritual practice.

Mulholland begins with the revealed Word of God as he delineates his argument for the necessity of growth toward spiritual wholeness for Christians: “Scripture reveals from the very beginning that human wholeness is associated with the image of God (Gen 1:26-27).”² Asserting that God’s intent from the dawn of creation was for persons to reflect God’s image and likeness. Mulholland then sets forth his premise that human wholeness, in its broadest sense, is the goal of Christian spiritual formation. He acknowledges that while God’s goal for humans is wholeness, “Scripture is quite clear in its insistence that we have fallen short of God’s purposes for our creation.”³ He also asserts that this spiritual formation is not done in isolation but rather in community, as “human wholeness is always actualized in nurturing one another toward wholeness.”⁴

The author proposes a “fourfold definition of spiritual formation as (1) a process (2) of being conformed (3) to the image of Christ (4) for the sake of others.”⁵ In a culture

¹ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 11.

² Ibid., 16.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁵ Ibid., 15.

that tends to seek instantaneous transformation, Mulholland offers an important corrective. God's work of transformation is a "day by day experience with its ups and downs, its victories and defeats, its successes and failures."⁶ In other words, with God, spiritual formation is a process. Mulholland moves on to the phrase "being conformed" by challenging the assumption that this is a "do it yourself" process. With God, the vital issue consists of surrendering the will so that God may do the work of conforming. This conforming work is an intricate dance that begins with God's action but invites human partnership. The "image of Christ" for Mulholland not only hearkens back to Genesis 1:26-27, but also reaches forward to Ephesians 4:13: "Until we all attain. . . to mature personhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."⁷ Mulholland's final phrase in his definition of spiritual formation, "for the sake of others" is a clear reminder that God's plan for spiritual formation in the Christian tradition is that it is done in the context of the covenant community. It is not intended to be an individual pietistic journey but an orientation outward from the self toward the needs of the world.

Mulholland also challenges the Church to present its case for the uniqueness of Christian formation to a culture that hungers for a spirituality that engages the whole person. However, Mulholland noted that this opportunity is often not taken: "The Christian community, which should have been a clear voice of liberation and wholeness in the wilderness of human bondage and brokenness, has too often been merely an echo

⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁷ Ibid., 34.

of the culture, further confusing those on a wandering and haphazard quest for wholeness.”⁸

For the purposes of this project, the limitation of this resource rests in the fact that there are no explicit references to the Twelve Steps in relation to spiritual formation. However, Mulholland has provided an excellent foundational definition of Christian spiritual formation. In it, he identifies human wholeness as the goal of the transformational process.

***Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard**

This classic volume by Dallas Willard provides insight into how the spiritual transformation process unfolds, without formulaic solutions, but rather with a focus on the partnership between the believer and God in a grace-filled journey. Willard’s contribution to the discussion of spiritual transformation lies in his keen understanding of both the human condition and the process by which God facilitates growth in persons seeking it.

Willard proposes a model of transformational growth that he has entitled the VIM (Vision, Intention, and Means) model.⁹ The three main conditions of spiritual growth are an adequate vision, an intention toward growth, and the means by which that will be accomplished. The author states: “If we are to be spiritually formed in Christ, we must have and must implement the appropriate *vision*, *intention*, and *means*. Not just any path we take will do. If this VIM pattern is not put in place properly and held there, Christ

⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 85.

simply will not be formed in us.”¹⁰ Willard asserts that spiritual transformation needs to be viewed not only as a possibility but also as the anticipated goal for the follower of Jesus Christ:

Hopefully, it will now be clear that our inner (and therefore outer) being can be transformed to increasingly take on the character of Christ. That transformation is not only possible, but has actually occurred to a significant degree in the lives of many human beings; and it is necessary if our life as a whole is to manifest his goodness and power, and if we as individuals are to grow into the eternal calling that God places upon each life.¹¹

However, according to the author, the church has often neglected this vision of transformation because it has focused on outward behaviors rather than on inward growth in character. Willard challenges the Church to a vision of spiritual formation that includes an adequate understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is available to disciples now as they seek to follow Christ, a belief that grace is available to pursue and live into Christ-like character, and that the Holy Spirit is available to empower disciples to do what they could not do solely on their own.¹²

The author continues: “Still, more than vision is required, and especially there is required an intention. Projects of personal transformation rarely if ever succeed by accident, drift, or imposition.”¹³ The intention to pursue the vision centers on the will. Willard states: “The vision of life in the kingdom through reliance on Jesus makes it possible for us to intend to live in the Kingdom as he did. We can actually decide to do

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 82.

¹² Ibid., 85-87.

¹³ Ibid., 83.

it.”¹⁴ This is the vision and the intention. Yet there must be an active component to this intention for each person, not simply an intellectual affirmation. Willard emphasizes: “Everyone must be active in the process of their salvation and transformation to Christ-likeness. This is an inescapable fact.”¹⁵ Yet, the author clarifies the dynamic partnership between the disciple and God: “The initiative in the process is always God’s and we would in fact do nothing without his initiative. However, that initiative is not something we are waiting on.”¹⁶ The intention begins with a choice to actually pursue this vision one day at a time. It includes the intention to live fully in the Kingdom of God, striving to obey Christ by honoring his words and following his example, as it is applied in the disciple’s daily circumstances.¹⁷ The combination of vision and intention leads to the final element in the pattern of spiritual transformation – and those are the means, or the practices, in which the disciple engages that, by the grace of God, lead to the realization of the vision of spiritual growth. Spiritual practices in the Christian tradition often call the disciple to a dying to the self, but they also lead to the emancipation of the new creature in Christ.

In the context of this final project, the Twelve Steps combined with classical spiritual practices are proposed as the means by which God works to transform the disciple into increasing Christ-like character. Willard identifies the Twelve Step model as one example of the means of transformation: “The famous Twelve Steps and the personal

¹⁴ Ibid., 87

¹⁵ Ibid., 83.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 88.

and social arrangements in which they are concretely embodied, including a conscious involvement of God in the individual's life – are highly effective in bringing about personal transformation.”¹⁸ The author acknowledges the contribution of the Twelve Step model to the Church with its expectation of physical, spiritual, and emotional transformation in its participants. He says: “Historically, the AA program was closely aligned with the church and Christian traditions, and now it has much to give back to a church that has largely lost its grip on spiritual formation as a standard path of Christian life. Any successful plan for spiritual formation, whether for the individual or group, will in fact be significantly similar to the Alcoholics Anonymous program.”¹⁹ Willard's insights into the process of transformation provide a needed perspective for individuals and for the church in the practice and teaching of spiritual formation. This foundational resource captures the interaction between the Twelve Step model and the process and practice of spiritual formation.

***The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ, Volume Four,*
Barbara Brown Zikmund, Series Editor**

One ecclesiology resource that informs this project is Barbara Brown Zikmund's extensive series on the theological heritage of the various streams that comprise the UCC, of which this congregation is a part. She asserts: “The United Church of Christ is a microcosm of the history of Christian theology. Although the UCC was not officially

¹⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹⁹ Ibid., 85.

‘born’ until 1957, it draws upon a long-standing and rich theological legacy.”²⁰ Like most denominations, the UCC is a product of its history and its local congregations carry that legacy. The UCC was born of the merger of the Congregational Christian churches and the German Evangelical and Reformed Churches in 1957. Brown Zikmund writes: “The UCC was created out of a mid-twentieth-century ecumenical passion to heal the divisions of the Christian church. Its focus was on the future, not on the past.”²¹ That merger brought together congregations with multiplicities of culture, history, theology, and practice. Over the years since the merger, these differences have created both rich diversity, and at times, great dissension. The autonomy of the individual congregation has contributed to a “free church” culture in many local congregations, which are a part of the UCC. That has been true for this local congregation.

Brown Zikmund collects the rich heritage of the UCC in this seven volume series. In Volume Four, she reflects on her knowledge of local congregations with this statement: “But members of the UCC often seem uncertain about their theological heritage and identity.”²² The autonomy of the local congregation in UCC polity often results in a local congregation that reflects the theological flavor of the previous or current pastoral leadership. From the Congregational Christian heritage comes a “profound mistrust of anything resembling creeds and confessions.”²³ Yet within the German Evangelical and Reformed Church, there was a profound respect for the

²⁰ Barbara Brown Zikmund, ed., *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ, Vol. 4* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), xiii.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 1.

Westminster Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, which were both used, in catechetical practices.²⁴ Over the course of thirty years from the 1920s through the merger of 1957, the desire for unity within the Christian Church led many in both the Congregational Christian tradition and the German Evangelical and Reformed churches to consider a merger. Brown Zikmund notes: “Yet, by the 1920s, the denomination (Evangelical) was aggressively recalling its loyalty to the supposedly Augustinian phrase, ‘In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things charity.’”²⁵ That phrase continues to be repeated in many circles of the UCC today. The UCC is non-creedal, yet at the time of the merger offered a Statement of Faith to the congregations.²⁶ However, this faith statement is non-binding on local congregations.

This particular volume addresses the roots of pietism and revivalism that have influenced the spiritual foundation of this local congregation. Midwest German pietism from the nineteenth century combined with the theological flavor of the Second Great Awakening has been formative spiritual influences in this particular congregation. Additionally, the influence of its Congregational heritage has led to a fierce autonomy from outside authority that contributes to the unique character of Jupiter First Church. This volume provides a glimpse into the broad and inclusive theological heritage of this congregation and the denomination of which it is a part. Attempting to address the theological heritage of this congregation for the purpose of this ministry initiative is

²⁴ Ibid., 511-13.

²⁵ Ibid., 211.

²⁶ Roger L. Shinn, *Confessing Our Faith* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1990), xi.

challenging because the theological influences on this congregation are as diverse as the denomination of which this faith community is a part.

***Thirst: God and the Alcoholic Experience* by James B. Nelson**

James Nelson offers a first-person account of the spiritual nature of addiction and recovery from the perspective of one trained in theology and who has spent his entire career teaching Ethics in a Christian seminary. This book contributes to this project by providing a model for theological reflection for those in the recovery process, as well as an apologetic for the power of the church's witness in offering grace to those who struggle with addiction. His chapters on "Grace and Brokenness" and "Journey and Home" conceptualize key elements in a healthy Christian recovery community. While the author primarily focuses on substance addictions in this book, in these sections, he generalizes about the elements that drive all addictions: "Simply put, compulsive behavior typically stems from trying to avoid shame."²⁷ For those caught in the web of addiction, the cycle of shame is repetitive and imprisoning. Nelson offers this insight: "If grace as forgiveness is God's fundamental answer to our guilt, grace as acceptance is the divine response to our shame."²⁸ The Church is in a unique position to communicate that message of forgiveness and acceptance in both word and in action.

Nelson recounts the story in John's Gospel of the disabled man lying beside the crowded pool at Bethesda as an illustration of the recovery process. The man had been waiting for thirty-eight years for healing. When Jesus noticed him, he asked a thought-

²⁷ James Nelson, *Thirst: God and the Alcoholic Experience* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 135.

²⁸ Ibid., 136.

provoking question: “Do you want to be made well?” (Jn 5:2-18). After a brief interchange, Jesus challenges the man to “take up his mat and walk.” Like the man in this story, Nelson reminds the reader that most persons in recovery discover that the process of healing from addiction combines both grace and work.²⁹ Nelson writes: “The point is, however, that work follows grace. It neither precedes grace nor is a condition for receiving it.”³⁰ While grace is the forerunner of recovery, will and work must follow if the healing is to be ongoing. Nelson personally attests: “As recovering people we know that we are in the process of being healed and also that we continue in our brokenness. We are not recovered alcoholics, but recovering.”³¹ In words spoken often in Twelve Step rooms, the goal is progress not perfection. The intersection of Twelve Step recovery and the mission of the church dovetail here. Nelson states:

My recovery community, with good reason, dissociates itself from any religious identifications or pretensions I understand that and affirm it. . . . At the same time, I am an alcoholic whose faith has been shaped by Christian community, and I cannot live in two disparate worlds. In fact, whenever I try to name those aspects of the recovery community particularly important to me, I find them to be aspects I also cherish in the best of my church experience: the storytelling, the vulnerability, the grace, the accountability, the mission. Both communities feed me in these ways, and each enriches my understanding and appreciation of the other.³²

Nelson continues: “The therapeutic power in A.A. seems to come from the combination of the program’s steps and the experience of the fellowship itself.”³³

²⁹ Ibid., 143.

³⁰ Ibid., 144.

³¹ Ibid., 145.

³² Ibid., 183.

³³ Ibid., 137.

According to Nelson, when the Church mirrors the acceptance and grace of the Twelve Step groups, the healing power of Christ is made manifest to those in recovery. He writes: “My communities did not in any way abandon me. Rather, in my disease, I withdrew from them. In spite of that, they stood with me with amazing staying power and grace. Great was their faithfulness.”³⁴ The power of Nelson’s book lies in the interweaving of his own story with theological reflection. However, the limitation of this resource for this ministry initiative is that there is not mention of the over-arching process of spiritual formation as related to Twelve Step recovery.

Addiction and Grace by Gerald May

An additional resource that addresses the Twelve Step process as a model for spiritual formation is psychiatrist Gerald May’s excellent book. In it, May considers the qualities of addiction that lead to the imprisonment of the soul and the recovery process as the pathway to freedom. While May focuses the majority of this book in describing the nature of addiction from a neurological, psychological, and behavioral perspective, the most interesting aspect of his writing for the purpose of this ministry initiative is his insight into the spiritual nature of addiction.

May begins with this definition of addiction: “Addiction is any compulsive, habitual behavior that limits the freedom of human desire. It is caused by the attachment or nailing, of desire to specific objects. The word behavior is especially important in this definition, for it indicates that action is essential to addiction.”³⁵ He moves on to

³⁴ Ibid., 188.

³⁵ Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 24-25.

elaborate on the spiritual component of addiction: “True addictions are compulsive habitual behaviors that eclipse our concern for God, and compromise our freedom.”³⁶ He also utilizes the concept of unhealthy attachment to persons, substances, or behaviors as lying at the heart of addiction, drawing on writings from the Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist traditions.

It is his contention that every human being is impacted by addiction if it is considered in its broadest sense: “I also learned that all people are addicts, and that addictions to alcohol and other drugs are simply more obvious and tragic addictions than others have. To be alive is to be addicted, and to be alive and addicted is to stand in need of grace.”³⁷ While May recognizes that this assertion might be controversial, he sets forth a case for his thesis that human beings by nature yearn for a relationship with God, but substitute countless other things for that relationship. He declares, “In our culture, the three gods we do trust for security are possessions, power, and human relationships. To a greater or lesser extent, all of us worship this false trinity.”³⁸ It is the pursuit of these false gods of security that lead most humans to addiction in one form or another.

The goal of spiritual formation for May is the “movement toward increasing fulfillment of the two great commandments – deepening love for God, others, and self.”³⁹ For this author, anything that stands in the way of that process can be considered an addiction. May stresses that the spiritual growth process cannot be self-managed: “It

³⁶ Ibid., 37.

³⁷ Ibid., 11.

³⁸ Ibid., 32.

³⁹ Ibid., 172.

cannot be packaged, programmed or taught. . . . The essential process is one of transformation, not education. It is, if anything, an unlearning process in which our old ways are cleansed, liberated, and redeemed.”⁴⁰ Above all else, spiritual transformation begins with relinquishment. The entire Twelve Step model is based on the concept of surrendering all that cannot be controlled into God’s care, allowing God to do the work that only God can do. That, for May, is the nature of grace.

In expanding on the spiritual aspects of addiction and recovery, May utilizes the scriptural metaphors of desert and garden, with special emphasis on stories from the Garden of Eden and the Exodus to illustrate his thesis. In both narratives, the reader sees the themes of temptation and slavery as well as freedom and recovery. Both stories reaffirm that God’s goal for humanity is that of complete wholeness of mind, body, and spirit through healthy relationships with God, with self, and with other human beings. May reminds his audience that while addiction “makes us prisoners of our own impulses, and slaves to our own selfish idols . . . God lovingly creates humans for a life of fullness, freedom, and love.”⁴¹ May acknowledges his own limitations in theological reflection: “Although I consider myself a reasonably careful scientist, I am neither a trained theologian nor a scriptural scholar.”⁴² While his treatment of Scripture does not follow careful exegesis, he has clearly researched the passages to which he refers, and chooses to use the broad concepts of Scripture in a metaphorical sense, which aid in furthering his thesis.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁴¹ Ibid., 91.

⁴² Ibid., xi.

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions by Alcoholics Anonymous

The two basic texts recommended for persons seeking recovery through the Alcoholics Anonymous fellowship are *Alcoholics Anonymous*, also referred to as “The Big Book” and this volume, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. Together, they form the essential library for those pursuing Twelve Step recovery. While *Alcoholics Anonymous* was the first written description of the efforts of the early founders of A.A., this book articulates the unfolding vision of the first generation of the leadership of Alcoholics Anonymous: “It presents an explicit view of the principles by which A.A. members recover and by which their society functions.”⁴³ This particular text “proposes to broaden and deepen the understanding of the Twelve Steps as first written in the earlier work.”⁴⁴ This book sets out to delineate and describe the Twelve Steps of recovery for Alcoholics Anonymous, which other Twelve Step groups have used for their purposes as well:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

⁴³ Alcoholics Anonymous, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1995), 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.⁴⁵

The authors assert: “A.A.’s Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole.”⁴⁶ To take this one step beyond the “obsession to drink,” many Christians have recognized the power of the Twelve Steps as a means of enhancing life recovery, a term that addresses the power of sin at work in a believer’s life. The apostle Paul aptly describes the obsessive power of sin in Romans 7:19-20: “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.” The anonymous authors of this book acknowledge the power of the steps to address other compulsions that challenge persons in their lives. “Many people, non-alcoholics, report that as a result of the practice of A.A.’s Twelve Steps, they have been able to meet other difficulties of life. They think that the Twelve Steps can mean more than sobriety for problem drinkers. They see in them a way to happy and effective living for many, alcoholic or not.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5-9.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

This ministry initiative's premise is that this Twelve Step model has the potential to empower adults to experience increased wholeness of mind, body, and spirit through growth in relationships with God, with self, and with other people. AA's focus on the power of the community to support and aid in recovery mirrors the Christian focus on the Body of Christ as necessary to the process of spiritual growth. In the Twelve Steps, Steps One through Three address the initiation or the restoration of a relationship with God. Steps Four through Seven speak to reestablishing a relationship with the self. Steps Eight through Ten deal with repairing relationships with other people. Steps Eleven and Twelve consider the process of learning to live out those relationships in everyday life.

The limitation of this book lays in the challenge many Christians experience in adopting the Twelve Steps as a model for spiritual formation. The language of the Twelve Steps can often be perplexing for Christians. In particular, the words "Higher Power" in Step Two, and "God, as we understand Him" in Steps Three and Eleven have become a stumbling block for many. Additionally, the language in Step Eleven about "praying only for knowledge of His will for us" is confusing. While difficult for many to understand, these limitations need not preclude the use of the Twelve Steps. While not explicitly formational for Christians, the overarching concepts inherent in the Twelve Steps dovetail the Christian spiritual formation process.

***A Hunger for Healing* by J. Keith Miller**

Keith Miller begins the book with this premise: "The Twelve Steps bring biblical principles of faith to bear on the pain of contemporary people in a way that leads sufferers into a close living relationship with God and frees them to live a meaningful life

seeking God's will."⁴⁸ It is his contention that the Twelve Steps provide a unique paradigm for spiritual growth for those living with the struggles of the human condition within the fragmentation of their culture. In particular, these Twelve Steps offer a means of transformation toward wholeness for Christians who seek a closer relationship with God, with themselves, and with other human beings. The author delineates how the Twelve Steps and the Christian faith complement one another, thereby providing a bridge between the Twelve Step culture and the Church.

Miller addresses how the Twelve Steps can be of value to those who are not impacted personally by substance abuse in themselves or in ones close to them. Miller also explores the concept of life recovery, acknowledging that while many people do not wrestle with substance abuse addiction or codependency, all humans have to wrestle with the condition of sin in their lives. He states: "The similarities to the underlying spiritual disease addressed by the Twelve Steps strongly suggested to me a connection between the way of life prescribed by those steps and a committed Christian's spiritual growth."⁴⁹

He suggests that the Twelve Steps can provide a means for addressing the recurring negative attitudes and behaviors that are the barriers to a healthy relationship with self, with God, and with other people. Miller affirms, "Spiritual growth through discipline is a way to face, discover, and let God remove the character defects that distort our perception of reality and of God and ruin our lives and relationships."⁵⁰ By applying the Twelve Steps to everyday Christian living, many have found themselves making

⁴⁸ J. Keith Miller, *A Hunger for Healing: the Twelve Steps as a Classic Model for Christian Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), xv.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

progress in laying aside besetting sin and becoming more conformed into the character of Christ. Additionally, that experience leads from inward growth to outward influence on others who might need the good news of life in recovery with Christ. Miller writes: “Millions of people find that working these steps frees them from compulsion and creates serenity, peace, joy, and healthier relationships with God and others. And significantly, the program produces people who reach out to others in pain.”⁵¹

One of Miller’s contributions to the literature on the Twelve Steps and Christian formation is his linkage of the concepts of recovery with the Scripture. In addressing an audience for whom Scripture is foundational, Miller offers a biblical foundation undergirding each of the Twelve Steps. In addition, he draws parallels between traditional Christian language and Twelve Step semantics, thereby bridging the objections that some Christians have raised about the Twelve Steps. In particular, Miller addresses the common stumbling block of the wording “God, as we understand Him” in Step Three,⁵² and the use of the term “Higher Power” in reference to God.⁵³ Miller makes the case that the Twelve Steps provide a model for following Christ in all of life:

There is something strangely familiar about this process to Christians. Jesus said, “He who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39). The doorway to healing through the Twelve Steps involves this same secret Jesus talked about. We give up our delusionary control in order to gain a reality-oriented self-control. His “follow me” adventure began with a turning loose process amazingly like Step One.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid., 7.

⁵² Ibid., 36-37.

⁵³ Ibid., xii, 36-37.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 26.

It is Miller's contention that the Twelve Steps mirror and reinforce the biblical teachings of the New Testament, creating disciples whose lives are transformed by walking in the way of Jesus. While this resource is helpful in addressing the elementary concepts of Twelve Step recovery to those in the Church, Miller stops short of providing a thorough exegesis of the Scriptures used or a broader theological foundation undergirding the Twelve Steps. However, this book is a valuable bridge between those in Twelve Step recovery and the Christian faith community contributing to greater mutual understanding.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR HOLISTIC SPIRITUAL FORMATION

This chapter will offer a biblical and theological rationale for the holistic spiritual formation process. Beginning with the concept of spiritual formation, it will be necessary to define the terms and to identify the goals of the process. Critical to this understanding will be an exploration of the creation narratives in the first three chapters of Genesis, focusing on the key themes of wholeness, brokenness, and the hope of restoration. Of special significance is the Hebrew word, *shalom*, which encompasses the breadth and depth of the meaning of wholeness.

In addition, by providing historical background on the Christian roots of the Twelve Step recovery movement, the chapter will demonstrate the relationship between Christian spiritual formation and recovery toward wholeness. This section will also consider the congruency of Twelve Step principles with the Christian faith. Finally, this chapter will address the four basic movements of the Twelve Step recovery process that parallel the movements of the journey toward wholeness of body, mind and spirit in the Christian tradition.

Theological Framework for Human Wholeness

Addressing the theological issues undergirding Twelve Step spiritual formation groups at Jupiter First Church must begin with an exploration of the terms human wholeness and spiritual formation and their inter-relationship. While they are not synonymous, they are integrally connected. Mulholland offers a comprehensive description of the goal and purpose of spiritual formation: “Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ, a journey into becoming persons of compassion, persons who forgive, persons who care deeply for others and the world, persons who offer themselves to God to become agents of divine grace in the lives of others and their world – in brief, persons who love and serve as Jesus did.”¹

Mulholland proceeds to offer a simple yet precise definition of spiritual formation: “It is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.”² Spiritual formation for the Christian is more than striving for a deeper relationship with God. Spiritual formation is holistic growth that centers on God and is initiated by God, but extends to the transformation of the self, with the person living as Christ’s representative in the world.

Spiritual formation is the normative model for the Christian life, designed to begin at the point of conversion and to continue throughout a disciple’s lifetime.

According to Mulholland:

The Christian journey is an intentional and continual commitment to a lifelong process of growth toward wholeness in Christ. It is a process of “growing up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15), until we “attain to. . .

¹ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 25.

² Ibid., 12.

mature personhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). It is for this purpose that God is present and active in every moment of our lives.³

While God initiates the spiritual formation process, the believer makes daily choices to participate in the means by which God produces the spiritual growth. Mulholland acknowledges: “Much contemporary Christian spirituality tends to view the spiritual life as a static possession rather than a dynamic and ever-developing growth toward wholeness in the image of Christ. . . . Holistic spirituality is a deepening responsiveness to God’s control of our life and being.”⁴ Mulholland continues by emphasizing the importance of the partnership between the believer and God in this journey: “But spiritual formation as being conformed will reveal that God is the initiator of our growth toward wholeness and we are to be pliable clay in God’s hand.”⁵

David Augsburger expands upon this holistic concept of spiritual formation. He presents tripolar spirituality as a model for spiritual formation with an emphasis on growth toward wholeness. Tripolar spirituality finds its foundation in Jesus’ words in Matthew 22:36-40: “‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.’” Augsburger states:

Tripolar spirituality, by definition, possesses three dimensions: it is inwardly directed, upwardly compliant, and outwardly committed. The spirituality of

³ Ibid., 24.

⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵ Ibid., 16.

personal transformation (the inner journey), the experience of divine encounter (the God-ward journey), and the relation of integrity and solidarity with the neighbor (the co-human journey with friend and enemy, with neighbor and persecutor) cannot be divided. Tripolar spirituality sees all three as interdependent.⁶

Thus, the spiritual formation process becomes a tripolar movement toward wholeness that engages the mind, the body, and the spirit as a believer seeks to grow in relationship with God, with self, and with other people.

Willard reaffirms this process of spiritual formation as a movement toward integration of the soul in body, mind, and spirit, deepening love for God, and increasing concern for others:

The ideal of the spiritual life in the Christian understanding is one where all of the essential factors of the human self are effectively organized around God, as they are restored and sustained by him. Spiritual formation in Christ is the process leading to that ideal end, and its result is love of God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and of the neighbor as oneself. The human self is fully integrated under God. The salvation or deliverance of the believer in Christ is essentially holistic or whole-life.⁷

May contributes his own understanding to the tripolar dimensions of spiritual formation: “Spiritual growth is movement toward increasing fulfillment of the two great commandments – deepening love for God, others, and self.”⁸ The goal of the spiritual formation journey thus appears to be a movement toward the integration of the person and oriented toward a deepening relationship with God and a growing commitment to the good of others. An exploration of key scriptural concepts will be helpful in further

⁶ David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 166.

⁷ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 31.

⁸ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 172.

developing the connection between spiritual formation and wholeness, beginning with God's intention for human beings as expressed in the creation narratives.

Indivisibility of the Soul in Hebrew Thought

The two creation narratives of Genesis provide a glimpse into God's intention for all of creation, and specifically for human beings. The first creation story sets the stage for the basis of the Hebrew understanding of the soul, with its emphasis on humans being made in the image and likeness of the Creator (Gn 1:26-27). The second creation narrative shows Adam (the human being) being brought to life by receiving God's breath in his nostrils (Gn 2:7). In that act, Adam became a living self or soul (*nephesh*). This word, *nephesh* occurs more than 780 times in the Old Testament. It has been variously translated as soul, self, living being, and heart.⁹ The soul in Hebrew thought was often a word used to denote the totality of the human person, created in the image of God.¹⁰

While Hebrew thought could distinguish the difference between the physical body and the essence of the living person or soul, there seemed to be no understanding of two separate, independent entities called body and soul. Rather, there was one self, created in the image and likeness of God. The Hebrew understanding of the human being was rooted in a unitive wholeness of mind, body, and spirit. Wenham notes: "The Old Testament does not sharply distinguish the spiritual and material realms in this way. The image of God must characterize one's whole being, not simply his mind or soul on the

⁹ James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 997.

¹⁰ James Strong, *New Strong's Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 95.

one hand or his body on the other.”¹¹ Thus, the human being, mind, soul, and body reflect the image of the Creator.

Contrast of Hebrew and Greek Thought on the Soul

A subtle but important distinction in the understanding of the soul lies in the difference between Hebrew and Greek thought on the subject. In the New Testament, the influence of Greek philosophical thought appears to have impacted the understanding of the word often translated as soul; *nephesh* in Hebrew, *psuche* in Greek. In attempting to appreciate this concept, it is important to acknowledge that the dualism of body and soul so often assumed in Greek philosophical thought, which has greatly influenced the Western philosophical tradition, does not exist in the same way in Hebrew thought. In describing the wholeness of the concept of the soul, May states: “The Platonic and Neoplatonic divisions between matter and spirit had a massive effect on Western thinking but are now generally seen as archaic and outmoded. Ironically, the wholeness expressed by the more ancient Hebrew thought is now seen as much more relevant to our modern times.”¹²

It is important to revisit Jesus’ Greatest Commandment as recorded in Matthew 22:36-40: “Teacher, which commandment in the Law is the greatest?’ He said to them, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart (*kardia*) and with all your soul (*psuche*) and with all your mind (*dianoia*). This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two

¹¹ Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 1, Genesis 1-15* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), 30.

¹² May, *Addiction and Grace*, 194-195.

commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” The Greek New Testament word, *psuche* is often translated as soul. However, it has also been translated as life, breath, and inner self.¹³ In this passage from Matthew, it is easy to see how the dualism that was a part of Greek philosophical thought might have influenced the interpretation of Jesus’ words. Scholars have often tried to delineate the differences between heart, mind, soul, and spirit, instead of viewing the unity of the whole person.

In Paul’s writings, the weaving together of the Greek philosophical tradition and the Hebrew thought continues to be evident. In Brown’s words: “The affirmation of human beings as bearers of the divine image in Genesis, together with the interpretation of the ‘*imago dei*’ tradition at the hands of Paul, points unquestionably to the uniqueness of humans in comparison to all other creatures.”¹⁴

In addition, one of the most important items to note in considering the roots of these words in the biblical languages is that the soul is the essence of the person, not easily divided. The propensity for Western writers to compartmentalize the human person into separate categories of body, soul, spirit, and mind runs contrary to the unity of person that both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures seem to present. Moreover, in Scripture and in the Jewish and Christian traditions, Augsburg describes the soul as wonderfully unique and individual, never to be repeated in another person.

The notion that individual souls are blended into one universal soul in the deeper levels of relationship is not rooted in either Hebrew or Christian thought, but in Buddhism and Hinduism. In both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures the person remains the highest unit of value in creation. . . . The Creator is a Divine

¹³ Wesley J. Perschbacher, ed., *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990) 444.

¹⁴ Warren Brown, Nancey Murphy and H. Newton Malony, *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 157.

Diversifier who brings out the distinctness, the uniqueness, the individual dignity and beauty of each in wild and glorious profusion.¹⁵

Brown suggests “that we use the soul to designate not a separable part of the person but rather the person’s inherent property of capacity for personal relatedness.”¹⁶ He delineates this concept even more clearly: “Thus, soul is manifest in the potentialities, characteristics, or attributes that allow humans to be related to others, to the self, and to God.”¹⁷ The soul is the essence of the human being who is made in the image of God.

May reinforces the unity of the soul when he writes: “Most people nowadays are trying to give up the distinctions that used to be made among body, mind, and spirit. Neurological science has effectively demonstrated that mind is brain and brain is body, and many theologians have recovered the old Hebrew sense that humans are beings who are souls rather than bodies that have souls.”¹⁸ One can make the argument that the formation of the soul is what is characteristically referred to as spiritual formation.

Concept of Wholeness and Brokenness in Genesis 1-3

The creation narratives in the first three chapters of Genesis present a compelling argument for the unique position of human beings in God’s order. In the first narrative in Genesis 1, the author describes the order of creation, beginning with the cosmos, and culminating in God’s fashioning of human beings. In each of the segments of this

¹⁵ David Augsburger, *Soulfulness: Soulfulness Vs. Mindfulness* (Pasadena, CA: Class Notes: The Call to Soul Making and Soul Mending, 2010), 2.

¹⁶ Brown, Murphy and Malony, *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 27.

¹⁷ Warren Brown, Nancey Murphy and H. Newton Malony, *Whatever Happened to the Soul?*, 225.

¹⁸ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 64.

creation story, the author pronounces a blessing on what God has done. The author repeats the phrase rhythmically throughout Genesis 1: “And God saw that it was good (*tov*). . . and there was evening and there was morning” for each day. The sixth day ushered in the apex of God’s creation and brought a slightly different response: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good (*tov meod*). And there was evening and there was morning – the sixth day” (Gn 1:31). Humans were not only pronounced good (*tov*) but appeared to be endowed with a higher degree of that goodness. This is further developed in Gn 1:26-27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” The author of Genesis proclaimed that humans were made in the very image and likeness of God. As to the image, it “refers to the entire human being, not to some part, such as the reason or the will,” but to the whole person.¹⁹

The early church theologian, Irenaeus, proclaimed the uniqueness of human beings in this way: “Man is a mingling of soul and flesh, fashioned after the likeness of God and formed by his hands, that is, by the Son and the Spirit, to whom he also said, ‘Let us make man.’”²⁰ He continued on: “But man he formed with his own hands, taking from the earth that which was, purest and finest, and mingling in measure His own power

¹⁹ Terence Fretheim, *New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 345.

²⁰ Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, Edited by Armitage Robinson, (New York: MacMillan Publishers), 1920, 51.

with the earth. For He traced his own form on the formation, that that which should be seen should be of divine form: for as the image of God was man formed and put on the earth.”²¹ Mulholland confirms these thoughts: “Scripture reveals from the very beginning that human wholeness is associated with the image of God.”²²

Within the broader historical context, it is noted that this passage alludes to a common custom in other early cultures: “The human is created in God’s ‘image’ or ‘likeness’, reflecting a practice among ancient Near Eastern kings who erected stone statues or images of themselves throughout their realm as an extension and reminder of the king’s dominion over the region. Given this background, humans are called to be living images or likenesses of God and extensions of God’s dominion over the earth.”²³

The second creation account in the book of Genesis begins with an image of a wilderness wasteland into which God breathes life. This story introduces another element into a theological understanding of the unique position of humans in God’s creation. In Genesis 2:7, the author writes: “Then the Lord God formed man (*adam*) from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being (*nephesh*).” God imparted God’s own breath to this being to bring it to life. In this narrative, “what distinguishes the human is that God breathes into the human lump of clay the breath of life, and only then does the human become a ‘living being.’ Life is an intimately given divine gift with every human breath a reminder of the giftedness of

²¹ Ibid., 80.

²² Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 16.

²³ Beverly Gaventa and David Peterson, eds., *New Interpreter’s Bible One Volume Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 2010, 4.

life.”²⁴ If the first two chapters describe the goodness and wholeness of what God formed, including the unique place of human beings in God’s order, then the third chapter of Genesis introduces the story of the “Fall,” in which the wholeness of creation was shattered, in which the image and likeness of God became distorted in God’s own creatures. This story in Genesis 3 weaves together a story of disobedience, deception, mistrust, and shame. This account of the Fall describes how humanity moved from the wholeness of the garden into the wilderness of sin and alienation. Mulholland aptly describes the effects of these choices:

Rebellion against God’s gracious work moves us into destructive and dehumanizing emptiness, into increasingly dysfunctional lives that are self-destructive and treat others as objects to be manipulated and used for our own purposes. Scripture is also clear in its witness to the fact that only God can liberate us from our bondage, heal our brokenness, cleanse us from our uncleanness, and bring Life out of our deadness. . . . Thus spiritual formation is the experience of being shaped by God toward wholeness.²⁵

This third chapter of Genesis provides a powerful metaphor of the effect of sin and brokenness on human beings and their relationships. What was once a world of beauty and wholeness becomes an environment of alienation, shame, and guilt: “A more complete transformation could not be imagined. The trust of innocence is replaced by the fear of guilt. The trees that God created for man to look at are now his hiding place to prevent God seeing him.”²⁶ God’s creatures turned away from God and turned against one another. What was once a relationship of openness and freedom between God and

²⁴ Ibid., 5.

²⁵ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 16.

²⁶ Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 1, Genesis 1-15* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), 76.

human beings has been distorted into a scene of pain and disorientation, with alienation between God and the ones formed in God's own image and likeness.

Eden's beauty and perfection is distorted by the power of sin but the hope of restoration lingers. Wenham appropriately pens: "Already the peace that characterized man's original relationship with the animals is shattered. Sin has put alienation between God and man, between men and women, and between animals and men. Yet the goal of universal peace (*shalom*) is not forgotten."²⁷ What was once a place of beauty became a place of brokenness. May contributed his perspective on the image of the garden: "Eden, as a garden, becomes symbolic of humanity's rightful relationship with God's grace. It represents both our birthplace and our destiny, our home and our promised land, where we rely upon grace as our ultimate security."²⁸

Wholeness in Scripture

If the goal of spiritual formation is a movement toward integrated wholeness within each person, oriented toward a deepening relationship with God, and a growing commitment to the welfare of others then, it is necessary to investigate the meaning of the word for wholeness in Scripture. The term most often used to describe wholeness in its multiple facets in Scripture is the Hebrew word *shalom*. *Shalom* occurs over 250 times in 213 verses of the Hebrew Scriptures.²⁹ "The general meaning behind the root *sh-l-m* is of completion and fulfillment – of entering into a state of wholeness and unity, a restored

²⁷ Ibid., 78.

²⁸ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 119.

²⁹ R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, and Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 931.

relationship.”³⁰ *Shalom* is often used to refer to restored relationships in community: “*Shalom*, in this case, means much more than the absence of war. Rather, the root meaning of the verb *shalem* better expresses the true concept of *shalom*. Completeness, wholeness, harmony, fulfillment, are closer to the meaning. Implicit in *shalom* is the idea of unimpaired relationships with others and fulfillment in one’s undertakings.”³¹ Walter Brueggemann states:

Shalom is the end of coercion. *Shalom* is the end of fragmentation. *Shalom* is the freedom to rejoice. *Shalom* is the courage to live an integrated life in a community of coherence. These are not simply neat values to be added on. They are a massive protest against the central values by which our world operates. The world depends on coercion. The world depends on fragmented loyalties. The world as presently ordered depends upon those very conditions against which the gospel protests and to which it provides alternatives.³²

Shalom is the enduring hope for humanity: “I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. I know the plans I have for you says the Lord, plans for *shalom* and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer 29: 10b-11, RSV).

While *shalom* in the Old Testament and *eirene* in the New Testament are often both translated with the same English word, peace, there are subtle distinctions between the two concepts: “*Shalom*, which occurs in other members of the Semitic language family, was influential in broadening the Greek idea of *eirene* to include the Semitic ideas of growth and prosperity.”³³ *Eirene* is most often translated with the word peace. Jesus offers his disciples peace: “My peace (*eirenen*) I leave with you, my peace

³⁰ Ibid., 930.

³¹ Ibid., 931.

³² Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (New York: United Church Press, 1982), 50.

³³ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 931.

(*eirenen*) I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (Jn 14.27). In the New Testament, Jesus not only gives peace, he becomes the believer’s peace, breaking down the walls between Gentiles and Jews: “But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace (*eirenen*); in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph 2:13-14). Paul challenges the church in Colossae to appropriate the peace of Christ in all their relationships: “Let the peace (*eirenen*) of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace.” (Col 3:15) Andrew Lincoln commented: “This peace involves not only a removal from all conflict but a centeredness that comes from knowing that in the new humanity Christ is in control and all in all.”³⁴

Mulholland correlates the image of Christ with the wholeness to which God calls each believer: “The image of Christ will be seen as the ultimate reality of human wholeness, the consummation for which each heart longs. It will, however, also be seen to be cruciform in the essence of its nature; a dying is involved in our growth toward wholeness, a cross upon which we lose our old self with its bondages and brokennesses.”³⁵ In essence, wholeness in Scripture encompasses the way of life God intended for each person from the dawn of creation. Living in the wholeness God desires leads to an integration of the entire self, including growth toward mature living into the image and likeness of God in all relationships. This wholeness includes *shalom* with God,

³⁴ Andrew Lincoln, *New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Volume XI* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 650.

³⁵ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 17.

shalom within the self, *shalom* with others, all of which is made possible through Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image and likeness of God.

Twelve Step Process as a Pathway to Spiritual Formation

From the creation story onward, God's intent is that humans would experience wholeness (*shalom*) of body, mind, and spirit. While this state of wholeness eludes many, the hope remains. Palmer notes: "No matter how broken our world, there is a hidden wholeness just beneath the surface of all visible things."³⁶ This hope is at the heart of the spiritual formation process. Augsburgsburger writes that this wholeness is more than the absence of fragmentation, disorientation, and sin: "Health of soul is not only the absence of emotional disease or thought disorder, but also the integration of physical, mental, social, and spiritual wellbeing into a holistic valuing entity."³⁷ Willard contributes: "Spiritual formation has presented itself as a hopeful possibility for responding to the crying, unmet need of the human soul. The hope springs once again for a response to the need that is both deeply rooted in Christian traditions and powerfully relevant to circumstances of contemporary life."³⁸ Spiritual formation in the Christian tradition not only offers the goal of wholeness in mind, body, and spirit, but the means by which disciples can be partners with God in the growth toward deepening relationships with the self, with God, and with other persons.

Palmer describes the danger of living in alienation: "The divided life is a

³⁶ Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: Journey Toward the Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 188.

³⁷ David Augsburgsburger, "Call to Soul Making and Soul Mending DMin Class," Fuller Theological Seminary class notes (Pasadena, CA, March 2010), Section 1, 15.

³⁸ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 21.

wounded life, and the soul keeps calling us to heal the wound. Ignore that call, and we find ourselves trying to numb our pain with an anesthetic of choice, be it substance abuse, overwork, consumerism, or mindless media noise. Such anesthetics are easy to come by in a society that wants to keep us divided and unaware of our pain.”³⁹ Palmer underlines an important caveat: “Wholeness does not mean perfection; it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life.”⁴⁰ The Twelve Step movement acknowledges the ease to which human beings shift into unhealthy patterns of living, which consequently create patterns of alienation in all significant relationships.

In making the case for the practice of the Twelve Steps as a vehicle for spiritual formation, Ryan and Ryan write: “The Twelve Steps are best known, of course, as a collection of spiritual disciplines that have been helpful to people recovering from addictions. Whether the addiction is to alcohol drugs, work, food, sex, ‘fixing’ other people, or to anything else, the Twelve Steps offer the building blocks for a saner, freer, more grace-full way of life.”⁴¹ The Twelve Steps offer spiritual practices that are intended to empower the participant to move toward the wholeness that is God’s intention for each person.

Cloud and Townsend write: “Recovery describes the sanctification process, the spiritual growth process, the task of reclaiming the image of God in ourselves, becoming like him. Recovery is another word for the maturing and healing events God

³⁹ Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 20.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁴¹ Ryan and Ryan, *A Spiritual Kindergarten*, 1.

accomplishes in our souls.”⁴² Keith Miller makes the case: "Many people who work the steps begin to see that the entire Twelve Step program is about spiritual growth, which in Twelve Step thinking is growth toward finding and doing God's will."⁴³ In other words, the goals of recovery through the Twelve Steps appear to share important similarities with spiritual formation in the Christian tradition. At this point, is important to investigate the origins, traditions, and values of the Twelve Step movement.

History of the Twelve Step Movement

The Twelve Steps themselves and all the various Twelve Step programs that have emerged from the first model of Alcoholics Anonymous were originally conceived by a man named Bill Wilson who found himself at the bottom of his alcoholic journey and reached out to in desperation to another person for help.⁴⁴ The rocky journey of a small group of men committed to sobriety one day at a time became the seed of what was to emerge as one of the most influential spiritual movements of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ As the organization grew, some influential figures and groups from Christian circles had a profound impact on the burgeoning movement. One, in particular, was Sam Shoemaker, an Episcopal priest, whose congregation housed the first New York meetings. An organization within the church with which Shoemaker was affiliated, called the Oxford Groups, influenced the early leaders of AA. Centered in Oxford, England, and spread to

⁴² Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Twelve Christian Beliefs That Can Drive You Crazy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 83.

⁴³ Miller, *A Hunger for Healing*, 196.

⁴⁴ Ernest Kurtz, *Not God: History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Press, 1979), 10-14.

⁴⁵ Miller, *Hunger for Healing*, xv.

the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, these small groups of like-minded individuals committed themselves to personal holiness and community accountability. Begun in 1908 as a fellowship of Christians seeking spiritual growth, “The Oxford Group was a non-denominational, theologically conservative, evangelically styled attempt to recapture the impetus and spirit of what its members understood to be primitive Christianity.”⁴⁶ The emphasis on the values of absolute honesty, repentance, surrender, and personal commitment in the Oxford Groups had a profound impact on the early members of Alcoholics Anonymous.⁴⁷

A review of AA’s history indicates a clear link between this para-church organization and AA’s development of its principles and the Twelve Steps.⁴⁸ In its own chronicles, Alcoholics Anonymous offers credit to the Oxford Groups: “But the important thing is this: The early AA got its views of self-examination, acknowledgement of character defects, restitution for harm done, and working with others straight from the Oxford Groups, and directly from Sam Shoemaker, their former leader in America, and from nowhere else.”⁴⁹ Willard echoes this assessment: “There can be no doubt that the AA program originated and gained its power from Christian sources, to meet needs that Christian institutions at the time should have been meeting but were not. It works in terms of essential structures of the human self revealed by God through his people.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Kurtz, *Not God*, 9.

⁴⁷ Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 39.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 85.

While the initial influence of the Oxford Group's principles on AA was significant, the two groups came to a parting of ways between 1937 and 1939 over several matters. Specifically, the Oxford Group's more evangelistic style diverged from AA's gentler and often more patient approach to surrendering to a relationship with God. In addition, the Oxford Group's use of prominent names identified with the movement was in sharp contrast to AA's commitment to anonymity.⁵¹ Ultimately, in a commitment to open the doors of AA to anyone in need regardless of religious orientation, the early members moved toward a more inclusive stance that was described in this way: "AA is a spiritual but not religious organization."⁵² The early leaders perceived the difficulty in appealing to both those who found comfort in the church and those who felt alienated from it: "It (AA) had to remain attractive to the temperamentally non-religious while avoiding giving offense to the personally religious."⁵³ The goal of this consciously open orientation was to empower anyone open to seeking sobriety, regardless of the person's religious orientation or lack of spirituality.

On reflecting on Twelve Step programs today, Miller notes that whatever a person's spiritual orientation upon entering a Twelve Step fellowship, "as they work the Steps and put their own lives in the hands of this God (whatever they call God at first) they discover firsthand the loving, redeeming, supporting, moral, and confronting nature of God. Later many of them see that this is in fact the same God that Christians believe

⁵¹ Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, viii, 74.

⁵² Kurtz, *Not God*, 176.

⁵³ Ibid.

in.”⁵⁴ While some Christians undoubtedly take offense at the expansive inclusivity that has come to define Twelve Step recovery, it is also evident that there is a strong historical link between the church and its spiritual practices and the Twelve Step movement.

Practices in Twelve Step Spirituality

The “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous describes three core principles upon which AA stands: “We find that no one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. Willingness, honesty, and open-mindedness are the essentials of recovery. But these are indispensable.”⁵⁵ These core values of honesty, openness, and willingness lie at the heart of Twelve Step spirituality. A story in Matthew’s gospel illustrates the essence of this thought. Immediately after Jesus called Matthew the tax collector to follow him, Jesus joined him at his home for a dinner. After hearing criticism from the Pharisees about his choice of companions, Jesus commented, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Mt 9:12). Twelve Step practitioners intuitively identify with the tax collector in this story because they have come to realize that it is only by facing the truth about themselves and appropriating the values of self-honesty, openness to the truth, and willingness to hear and take action, that growth toward wholeness and recovery will occur in their lives.

At the heart of the entire Twelve Step movement is an orientation toward community. A cursory review of the Twelve Steps will reveal that the Steps are expressed in “we” language. The early proponents of AA understood that an intentional

⁵⁴ Miller, *A Hunger for Healing*, xiii.

⁵⁵ Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 568.

focus on the communal experience of recovery from addiction was necessary for continuing sobriety. This collective emphasis on bands of fellow travelers gathering together for mutual sharing of their experience, strength, and hope became the model for small group recovery that continues to this day. This same community emphasis is true for growth toward wholeness through spiritual formation in Christian circles. May affirms this conviction: “Whatever the form, involvement of other people is an essential component of a consecrated life. There is no authentic way around it.”⁵⁶ Each small group, whether in recovery or spiritual formation, has an opportunity to connect together in mutual edification. May continues: “With grace, they (groups) can become dedicated to their shared heart’s desires for God, committed to the holy spaciousness through which grace shines most brilliantly.”⁵⁷

Augsburger points out the current cultural bias toward individual spirituality: “In popular usage, it (spirituality) now refers to a privatized, individualized, non-relational reverence for one’s unique humanness, universal core, or essential humanity.”⁵⁸ In a society where so much spirituality appears to be privatized, both Twelve Step meetings and spiritual formation small groups in the Church serve as a corrective reminder of the power of communal spirituality: “Scripture reveals that human wholeness is always actualized in nurturing one another toward wholeness.”⁵⁹ Mulholland inserts a significant caveat on the importance of the community in the spiritual growth process: “Corporate

⁵⁶ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 173.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁸ Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship*, Kindle Electronic Edition Location 108-110.

⁵⁹ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 17.

spirituality is essential, because privatization always fashions a spirituality that in some ways allows us to maintain control of God.”⁶⁰

Another core principle of the Twelve Step movement is the focus on seeking progress but not perfection in this journey toward wholeness.⁶¹ Since discouragement is often a part of both recovery and spiritual formation, this principle can be helpful in a re-orientation toward a long-term vision. Consistent with the Christian spiritual formation process, this perspective is comforting to believers who acknowledge that the journey is a lifelong one. Nelson notes: “But God has not promised that we will be allowed to complete what we have begun. The gracious promise is that we are allowed to participate in what God has done.”⁶² It is God who both orchestrates and empowers the process of growth toward wholeness.

Twelve Steps: Four Movements of the Spiritual Life

Through daily practice, the Twelve Steps provide one pathway toward spiritual formation. According to Ryan and Ryan, embedded in the Twelve Steps are four distinct movements of the spiritual life, that when regularly practiced, lead to wholeness in body, mind, and spirit, and in restored relationships with God, with ourselves, and with other human beings.⁶³ The first three steps provide a pathway to *shalom* with God, through emphasis on surrender of the entire self to God. The next focus on the spiritual journey is

⁶⁰ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 149.

⁶¹ Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 60.

⁶² James Nelson, *Thirst: God and the Alcoholic Experience* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 190.

⁶³ Ryan and Ryan, *Spiritual Kindergarten*, 2.

an honest reflection on the self in Steps Four through Seven, noting both strengths and weaknesses, as the believer asks God to remove the defects of character and magnify the strengths of soul. Steps Eight through Ten challenge the practitioner to reflect on any obstacles in relationships with other people. These steps also provide the means to repair those relationships by seeking and accepting God's forgiveness, learning to forgive others and self, and ultimately to the hope of reconciliation in those relationships. Steps Eleven and Twelve offer daily practices aimed at keeping the *shalom* in those relationships as we live in partnership with Christ, who offers daily strength.

The first three steps provide the means by which one moves from humility to surrender to God.⁶⁴ For those who choose to use these steps as a pathway for spiritual transformation, the word "alcohol" is often replaced with the word "sin," signifying any attitude or behavior that stands in the way of complete surrender to God. It becomes evident that humility must become the starting point for this journey of faith. Andrew Murray offered these words: "Humility is not so much a grace or a virtue along with others; it is the root of all, because it alones takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all."⁶⁵ Rohr adds these words on humility as a precursor to all spiritual growth toward wholeness: "God seems to have hidden holiness and wholeness in a secret place where only the humble will find it."⁶⁶ This sense of raw humility necessitates a movement toward God in surrender. Rohr continues on this subject: "The surrender of faith does not happen in one moment but is an extended journey, a trust

⁶⁴ Refer to Appendix A for the complete listing of the Twelve Steps.

⁶⁵ Andrew Murray, *Humility* (Christian Book Series, 2003), Kindle Electronic Edition, 4.

⁶⁶ Richard Rohr, *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony's Messenger Press, 2011), 8.

walk, a gradual letting go, unlearning, and handing over. . . . To finally surrender ourselves to healing, we have to have three spaces opened up within us – and all at the same time: our opinionated head, our closed-down heart, and our defensive and defended body.”⁶⁷ Rohr reminds those who seek to embrace these first steps of their connection to Jesus’ own words: “If anyone wants to follow me, let him renounce himself (Mk 8:34). . . . I am pretty sure that Jesus meant exactly what Bill W. means in Step Three: a radical surrendering of our will to Another whom we trust more than ourselves.”⁶⁸

The next four steps lead to increasing *shalom* with ourselves. Steps Four through Seven are the journey of self-examination and listening prayer.⁶⁹ The person seeking to work through these steps soon recognizes the difficulty of letting go of all denial and facing the self in its true state. Rohr writes: “A searching and fearless moral inventory is for the sake of truth and humility and generosity of spirit, not vengeance on the self or some kind of total victory over the self. Seeing and naming our faults is probably not so much a gift to us – although it is – as it is to those around us.”⁷⁰ These four steps challenge the traveler to honestly reflect on the self, in order to allow God to do the necessary surgery of the soul that leads to transformation. May writes: “It is important to note that the spiritual growth process involves far more relinquishment than acquisition. . . . It cannot be packaged, programmed, or taught. . . . the essential process is one of

⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁹ Refer to Appendix A for a full listing of the Twelve Steps.

⁷⁰ Rohr, *Breathing Under Water*, 32.

transformation, not education. It is, if anything, an unlearning process in which our old ways are cleansed, liberated, and redeemed.”⁷¹

The next three steps move the pilgrim from confession to forgiveness, and ultimately to reconciliation. These are the movements toward *shalom* with others.⁷² Steps Eight through Ten are the steps of confession to reconciliation and beyond. These steps offer a means by which relationships with others might be restored, although for many, not without struggle. Rohr penned: “Amazing Grace is not a way to avoid honest human relationships but to redo them – but now gracefully – for the liberation of both sides. Nothing just goes away in the spiritual world; all must be reconciled and accounted for.”⁷³

Steps Eleven and Twelve offer an ongoing process for living in daily conscious connection with God and in giving from the overflow of a life in Christ.⁷⁴ These steps illuminate a way of living *shalom* in every moment. These last two steps culminate in a life dedicated to the surrender to, and the daily living out of the will of God, wherever that pathway may lead. Rohr wrote these words: “People’s willingness to find God in their own struggle with life – and let it change them – is their deepest and truest obedience to God’s eternal will. . . . At that point, God has won, and the ego has lost, and your prayer has already been answered.”⁷⁵ The natural consequence of living out Steps

⁷¹ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 105.

⁷² Refer to Appendix A for a full listing of the Twelve Steps.

⁷³ Rohr, *Breathing Under Water*, 69.

⁷⁴ Refer to Appendix A for a full listing of the Twelve Steps.

⁷⁵ Rohr, *Breathing Under Water*, 103.

Eleven and Twelve is a moment-by-moment connection with God and a life lived in gratitude to God, sharing the good news of recovery toward wholeness and spiritual awakening with others.

In reflecting on the connection between the gospel and the daily practice of these steps, Martin Davis writes: “Those who live by spiritual principles follow a different set of rules than those of the world: to keep it, give it away; to find it, lose it; to increase, decrease; to be great, become a servant; to be first, be last.”⁷⁶ The Twelve Steps hearken to the great themes of Scripture and especially to the life and words of Jesus Christ, providing a model for spiritual formation toward *shalom* for the disciple of Jesus.

⁷⁶ Martin Davis, *The Gospel and the Twelve Steps: Following Jesus on the Path of Recovery* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word Books, 2004), 210.

PART THREE

MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 4

PLAN FOR MINISTRY INITIATIVE

Chapter Four will present a plan for a small group ministry with the goal of empowering participants to seek and experience growth in wholeness by practicing the Twelve Steps along with the spiritual disciplines associated with these steps. To facilitate this pilot project, small group leaders will be recruited who exhibit spiritual maturity, interest in the connection between the Twelve Steps and spiritual formation, and who have gifts in the area of small group leadership. The participants in the pilot group will be chosen from volunteers who seek spiritual growth in a community of fellow disciples, who are open to utilizing the Twelve Steps as a means of spiritual formation, and are committed to participating in the entire program. Upon completion of this small group experience, the participants will be provided with the opportunity to evaluate both this program and their next steps in planning for continued spiritual growth.

Journey to Wholeness in Twelve Step Small Groups

Spiritual formation groups at Jupiter First Church are offered on a regular basis acknowledging that growth for those on the pilgrimage of faith is a lifelong process. The disciple seeking to grow in wholeness, into fulfilling God's intention for a life in Christ,

comes to recognize that this journey may be challenging, but God provides the necessary resources with daily help along the way. Willard offers these important words: “But the one lesson we learn from all available sources is that there is no ‘quick fix’ for the human condition. The approach to wholeness is for humankind a process of great length and difficulty that engages all our own powers to their fullest extent over a long course of experience.”¹ This is not to say that the disciple is marching on his or her own strength, but joins in partnership with God through a lifetime of transformative change.

Willard offers a perspective that affirms both the necessity of modeling and teaching spiritual formation in the local church: “Spiritual formation in the tradition of Jesus Christ is the process of transformation of the inmost dimension of the human being, the heart, which is the same as the spirit or the will. It is being formed (really transformed) in such a way that its natural expression comes to be the deeds of Christ done in the power of Christ.”² In the past, many of the spiritual formation classes at Jupiter First Church have focused on providing information to the participants, with the hope that changes in attitudes, volition, and behavior might follow. In research for this ministry initiative, it has become evident that transformation is more caught than taught.³ Unless the participants have the opportunity to practice and experience a new way of living, the persistent behavioral patterns that have become obstacles in their relationships with God and with other people will continue to derail the spiritual formation process.

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), 70.

² Dallas Willard, “Spiritual Formation: What it is, How it is Done,” Dallas Willard, USC Professor, Speaker, Author, <http://www.dallaswillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=58> (accessed June 2, 2010,) 1.

³ Johnson, “Intentionality of the Heart,” 63.

However, in light of this understanding, Willard underlines an important danger for any local church, which seeks to implement processes of spiritual formation:

It is that spiritual formation will simply become a new label for old activities – for what we are already doing: worship, hearing the word, community, quiet time, plus a new twist or two such as spiritual direction and so on. Now all of these things are very important. But if spiritual formation merely becomes a new label for things we are already doing, it will leave us right where we are. And the issues of deeper transformation will remain untouched.⁴

Packaging the same spiritual practices without addressing the underlying motivations of the deeper self will lead only to superficial change, not deeper transformation into the image of Christ. For that, a new strategy will be needed, one that engages the body, the mind, and the spirit in the process of spiritual growth.

To facilitate more holistic transformation for the participants, this project combines both didactic teaching and experiential learning in the form of the practice of the spiritual disciplines contained in the Twelve Steps. Willard's argument for the need to engage the body in the process of spiritual formation has profoundly influenced this project. He asserts: "The one reason why the idea of spiritual transformation through being merely preached at and taught doesn't work is because it does not involve the body in the process of transformation. One of the ironies of spiritual formation is that every 'spiritual' discipline is a bodily behavior. We have to involve the body in spiritual formation because that's where we live and what we live from."⁵ Thus, this project seeks to incorporate the body, mind, and the spirit in the change process.

⁴ Willard, "Spiritual Formation," 4.

⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

The preferred outcome for members in this ministry initiative at Jupiter First Church is that they would be empowered to experience increased wholeness of mind, body, and spirit as they grow in relationship to God, self, and other people. The goal for the participants is that they might learn to utilize the Twelve Steps as a vehicle of personally engaging in the spiritual formation process, trusting that God will bring both growth and maturity as they participate as co-laborers on the journey.

Strategy Goals for Twelve-Step Recovery Groups

For many at Jupiter First Church, the Twelve Steps are understood solely as a pathway of recovery for those contending with substance abuse or various other addictions. The challenge in this ministry initiative is to provide a theological and biblical rationale for the participants in this small group experience that will broaden their understanding of the Twelve Steps to include spiritual formation. The goal is to empower participants to experience the daily practice of the Twelve Steps as one model of spiritual formation in the Christian tradition that can lead to personal wholeness and deepened relationships with the self, with God, and with others.

Ironically, the unique challenge in this particular ministry setting may be the repeated emphasis on the grace of God, over and against a limited discussion of the concept of sin. While sin is occasionally addressed from the pulpit, it is most often overshadowed by a discussion of the limitlessness of God's grace. When sin is described, it is often re-packaged for people who have grown weary of hearing about their sinful natures in other settings, in order that they might be able to understand it in a new manner. Many of the congregants at Jupiter First Church have come from other Christian

traditions in which they report that they have heard much more about their own sinfulness than about God's grace. One of the comments often voiced by new members at Jupiter First Church is how much they appreciate the focus on grace rather than on sin in this faith community. Unfortunately, this emphasis can be problematic when introducing certain biblical and theological concepts in spiritual formation training. As a result, utilizing the Twelve Steps, with its orientation toward the necessity of acknowledging the power of sin in one's life, as a precursor to experiencing the freedom of a life in Christ, may be a difficult model for many to acknowledge or embrace.

Another goal in this ministry project is to help the participants understand the history of the Twelve Steps and its deep roots in the Christian faith. In discussing and planning for this ministry initiative, both church staff and members frequently voiced some common misconceptions that Christians hold about the Twelve Steps. Some suggested that the Twelve Steps are disconnected from the Christian tradition. Of particular concern is the use of the term, "God as we understood Him" in the third step, and the commonly repeated phrase that AA is a "spiritual but not religious" organization.⁶ Unfortunately, some who are involved in the Twelve Step community, but not in the Church, either because of hearsay or through personal experience, frequently declare their assumption that the Church is the antithesis of a grace-filled or supportive environment. In planning for this ministry initiative, church members often offered their own reservations about the Twelve Steps, based on what they perceive as a bias against the Church in Twelve Step circles. A review of the history of Alcoholics Anonymous and

⁶ This phrase has become so familiar in the culture that it is used not only to describe Twelve Step organizations but also to persons who simply describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious."

its roots in the Christian spiritual formation of the Oxford Groups may help correct this misconception. In addition, a careful review of the Twelve Steps will show a comprehensive model of spiritual growth that is consistent with both Scripture and the Christian tradition.

An additional hope for those involved in this initiative is that they will come to understand a Christian spiritual formation process that leads to wholeness by experiencing it in a small group community. The participants will be asked to practice the four movements of the spiritual life embedded within the Twelve Steps: *shalom* with God, *shalom* with the self, *shalom* with others, and keeping the *shalom*. This model mirrors a spiritual formation process that begins with a surrender that leads to peace with God, is followed by a comprehensive inventory of the self that contributes to increasing integration, an evaluation of past and current relationships, and a strategy to make peace in those relationships, and a means for continuing this pathway of spiritual formation. The participants will learn the tripolar dimensions of spiritual formation: the upward connection with God, the inward reflection on the self, and the outward dimension oriented to strengthened relationships with others.⁷

Another one of the goals of this ministry initiative is to empower participants to begin to experience release from some of the persistent negative attitude and behavior patterns that have been obstacles in their spiritual growth process. The Twelve Steps encourage participants to be honest with themselves about those patterns, turning to God to address the roots, in order that God might transform not only the behaviors, but the motivations and attitudes as well. This orientation to the whole person has the potential to

⁷ Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship*, Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 166.

help participants experience deeper personal change leading to an increased sense of freedom and wholeness in Christ.

Jupiter First Church offers a full menu of adult education classes, including many aimed at those seeking spiritual formation in small groups. Over the past six years, an increasing number of persons have participated in longer-term study groups, which have ranged from thirteen to thirty weeks. During the course of those classes, the participants routinely gathered for a community meal prepared by a different small group each week, shared in worship, and heard the testimony from one of the leadership team, before breaking into small groups for a discussion of the topic of the day. This process has contributed to a self-reported deepening sense of spiritual growth in the participants and a strong commitment to small group ministry. In planning for this ministry initiative, the team leaders chose to follow a similar format and sought to recruit many of the people who had previously been involved in spiritual formation groups, while also intentionally offering an invitation to those who had not yet experienced a spiritual formation group at Jupiter First Church. At the end of this project, one of the hopes is that the participants might be empowered to use this Twelve Step model to continue their own spiritual growth process.

Leadership Recruitment and Resource Development

Prior to the beginning of the project, a leadership team, consisting of some Jupiter First Church staff members and committed lay leaders, gathered to brainstorm about a new ministry initiative that would combine the Twelve Step recovery model with traditional Christian spiritual formation practices. This ministry initiative was born of this

dialogue. In the summer of 2013, the team leaders met to begin the process of curriculum selection and development.⁸ They reviewed Miller's book, *Hunger for Healing*, which provides a comprehensive review of the Twelve Steps and its correlation to both the Scripture and the spiritual growth process.⁹ Adel Calhoun's resource, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, offered an excellent description and practical suggestions for incorporating spiritual disciplines into any spiritual formation process.¹⁰ After research on several studies combining the Twelve Steps with Scripture, a Bible study entitled *Spiritual Kindergarten* was chosen as one of the participant workbooks.¹¹

However, the leaders decided that this book alone was insufficient to engage the participants in the goals of this initiative. Thus, in order to aid project members in incorporating the Twelve Steps and corresponding spiritual disciplines into their everyday lives, the team leaders also chose to create a companion resource entitled *Shalom: Twelve Steps to Wholeness*, which expanded the *Spiritual Kindergarten* Bible study to twenty weeks by adding resources for each session that further explained the Twelve Steps from a theological and biblical perspective, provided journal questions for weekly reflection, and enhanced the study with spiritual disciplines that engaged the body, mind, and the spirit, for the participants to practice between each session. A

Leader's Guide corresponding to both of the resources was also developed for the weekly

⁸ The team leaders included this writer and a retired teacher who had considerable experience in curriculum development and lesson planning for high school students. In addition, she has provided leadership and assisted with curriculum developments for adults in spiritual formation small groups at Jupiter First Church for many years.

⁹ Miller, *Hunger for Healing*.

¹⁰ Adel Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005).

¹¹ Ryan and Ryan, *Spiritual Kindergarten*.

group gatherings. This companion resource included a schedule for the combined group gathering, a suggested format for each session, discussion questions for the small groups, and creative large group activities designed to engage the mind, the body, and the spirit of the participants.¹²

After prayerful consideration, the team leaders met to discuss the criteria for small group leadership for this ministry initiative, with input from both the pastoral and program staff. Discussion included the need for both male and female leaders who exhibit emotional and spiritual maturity as disciples of Christ, proficiency in small group leadership, and respect from their peers for their leadership abilities. Considerable dialogue ensued concerning whether the leaders needed Twelve Step experience to effectively lead their small groups. Both perspectives were debated at length. Ultimately, the team leaders decided to include an equal number of persons with and without Twelve Step background, thereby creating teams of co-leaders with varying life experience. The hope was that the leaders would reflect the background of the participants in the ministry initiative.

The small group facilitators were recruited in the summer of 2013. When contacted personally by the team leaders about being a part of the leadership for this project, they were asked to commit to participate in two leader training retreats, a weekly one hour leadership meeting during the course of the study, attendance at all sessions, written end-of-course evaluations, and a post-course evaluation retreat. The team leaders recruited ten small group facilitators, including three men and seven women to join the

¹² Both the entire Participant and Leader's Guide for *Shalom: Twelve Steps to Wholeness* are available from this author. A sample of the weekly assignment for participants and the lesson plan for the leaders is provided in Appendices C and D.

team leaders in the initiative. The team leaders did not address the age distribution of the leaders in the planning stage. Thus, the leadership was skewed toward an older population, with most of the leaders in the fifty to sixty year age range, with the youngest leader at thirty-eight, and the oldest leader at sixty-seven. Thus, twelve facilitators committed to the project, which provided the leadership for six small groups of eight persons each, allowing for thirty-six additional participants.

At the first leader's gathering with the small group facilitators, some lively discussion ensued about the proposed makeup of the small groups. Many of the previous spiritual formation groups at Jupiter First Church had been set up intentionally as single gender groups. Generally speaking, those who had participated in those experiences expressed the sentiment that they enjoyed the camaraderie of their common backgrounds and interests. However, the men on the leadership team had been in several small groups together, and two indicated that a change would be welcomed. Ultimately, the leadership team made the decision to mix the groups with men and women, to enable fresh opportunities for growth and learning for all participants.

Another challenge emerged in the planning process regarding facilities. In the past, most spiritual formation groups at Jupiter First Church had been able to meet in small classrooms across the church campus, which helped safeguard a sense of quiet, privacy, and confidentiality for the members. However, because of an increase in small groups gathering on the chosen night, this project was provided with one large room with six round tables around which to meet. This particular challenge was met with both strong resistance and skepticism from most of the small group facilitators, who were

concerned about sacrificing privacy and emotional safety for the participants. However, it was a challenge over which the team leaders had no control.

Content of the Strategy

During the summer of 2013, congregational members were offered an invitation to participate in a small group experience focusing on the Twelve Steps as a pathway to wholeness in mind, body, and spirit. Posted on the church website and as an insert in the weekly printed congregational announcements, this invitation was offered:

You are invited to join in a special spiritual journey using a curriculum we have developed. It will be an experience of spiritual discovery, combining the Twelve Steps, Bible study, and structured activities for spiritual growth. Whether you have ever experienced the Twelve Steps of recovery or not, this program will broaden your perspective on them. Many people mistakenly believe that the Twelve Steps are only for those with substance abuse addictions. However, many Christians have discovered that the Twelve Steps are a great model for spiritual transformation and by practicing these principles day by day, Christ has radically transformed their lives. We are inviting those who would like to commit themselves to a twenty-week study on Monday evenings, beginning October 21st and ending on March 17th. We will be sharing a dinner together, exploring the Twelve Steps with corresponding Bible study and spiritual disciplines, engaging in experiential exercises, and enjoying great small group discussions.¹³

The leaders planned for an October 21st launch of the initiative, in order to provide enough time to complete the curriculum, to facilitate leadership training, to recruit participants, and to procure the needed material resources for the project. This timing also ensured that the first five steps, which are often considered to be some of the most challenging of the Twelve Steps, would be completed before the two week Christmas break.

¹³ Jupiter First Church, "Spiritual Formation at Jupiter First Church," <http://jupiterfirstchurch.org/home> (accessed 9-1-13).

Signups for the class were held both online and through Sunday morning registration. Fifty-two persons enrolled in the class, including the twelve pre-selected leaders. The full group for this project was comprised of fourteen men and thirty-eight women. While the expectation of the leaders was for a balance between men and women, the actual enrollment seemed to reflect the percentages in the previous spiritual formation classes. The number of overall participants was a little higher than the registration projected by the leaders. However, instead of limiting the number, the leaders discussed it and decided to include all who had signed up, assuming that some attrition would occur. At the initial meeting in October, fifty-two persons were in attendance. Each of the assigned groups was comprised of six or seven participants with two co-leaders.

The ministry initiative will depend upon participants who are engaged in the process, who are willing to complete the daily assignments, practice the spiritual disciplines on a regular basis, and to come to the group meetings with honesty, openness, and willingness to participate in each session around their tables. The experience is designed to include didactic material on the Twelve Steps through a combination of an inductive Bible study entitled *Spiritual Kindergarten*,¹⁴ as well as the leader written participant workbook, *Shalom: Twelve Steps Toward Wholeness*.

The weekly large group gathering will begin with a meal prepared by one of the small groups. Following the table fellowship, each evening one of the twelve small group facilitators will share a personal testimony on the highlighted step for that week. Each session will be guided by the Leader's Guide for *Shalom: Twelve Steps Toward Wholeness*, which provides detailed guidelines for the small group discussion, thought-

¹⁴ Ryan and Ryan, *Spiritual Kindergarten*.

provoking questions for reflection, and experiential exercises related to the step under consideration for the week. All the *Shalom* materials are intended to enhance the Bible study with additional teaching on the Twelve Steps and its connection to Christian spiritual formation, along with a deeper explanation of the accompanying spiritual disciplines and opportunities for written reflections. The final session will include a time for testimonies by the participants to be followed by a service of prayer and Holy Communion.

Essential to the perceived value of each participant's experience in this ministry project will be their sense of a supportive community in their small groups. The ideals of honesty, openness, and vulnerability will be articulated by the leaders, and modeled by each of the speakers at the beginning of each session. Each of the leaders will be guided in preparing a testimony that reflects his or her own experience of working the step under consideration with humility and a measure of vulnerability. In order to be an encouragement and catalyst for discussion, the speakers will also be encouraged to share the strength and the hope they find in practicing that particular step as a part of the Christian life. With time spent together in the small groups, the hope is that a sense of support and mutual accountability will emerge and grow over the course of the program.

In light of this ministry initiative's goal of engaging the body, spirit, and mind in the spiritual formation process, teaching about and practice of the spiritual disciplines is incorporated within the written curriculum for the participants. Each of the steps calls on one or more of the traditional Christian spiritual disciplines that are intended to be practiced one day at a time. Thus, each week, the participants in the ministry initiative will be taught about and encouraged to practice the spiritual discipline correlated with the

step being studied that week. The spiritual disciplines included in this project are: *lectio divina*, solitude and silence, surrender to God, scriptural meditation, journaling and contemplation, daily spiritual inventory, prayer of *examen*, confession to another, confession to God, forgiveness of others, humility, discernment, blessing of enemies, the sacrament of the present moment, meditation, gratitude, and witness.

Evaluation and Planning for Future Growth

In order to assess the effectiveness of this ministry initiative based on *Shalom: Twelve Steps to Wholeness*, leaders, and participants will be asked to complete written pre-course surveys and post-course evaluations.¹⁵ In addition, all participants will be offered the opportunity to verbalize the learning that they may experience during the initiative at the closing session. Careful notes of the spoken testimonies will be taken by the small group facilitators and organized to aid in the evaluation process. The small group leaders will also be asked to write additional individual assessments and meet together for a post-course debriefing and evaluation. Appreciation in the form of a gift will be given to each of the leaders. Attention will now turn to the implementation of this ministry initiative with a detailed description of its opening session through its conclusion, along with the subsequent evaluation.

¹⁵ Copies of both Pre-Course Surveys and Post-Course Evaluations are available in Appendices E and F.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE MINISTRY INITIATIVE

The fifth chapter will outline the process of implementation and evaluation of the Twelve Step spiritual formation ministry initiative at Jupiter First Church. This chapter will describe the ministry initiative process, provide timelines for the implementation of the project, including the development of a curriculum and the recruitment and training of small group facilitators, speakers, and adjunct support personnel. Attention will be given to the resources required for the successful launch and completion of the program, including the curriculum, facilities, staff, and budgetary requirements. Finally, this chapter will consider the evaluation and analysis of the project, in order to enhance the ministry initiative for future purposes.

Pilot Project Summary

During the summer of 2013, the theological and biblical research for this course was completed. During that time, the team leaders selected the appropriate written material for this course, developed the concepts to be addressed in the twenty sessions, and created the participant and leader's guides, *Shalom: Twelve Steps to Wholeness*. During July, the small group leaders were recruited. In August 2013, adequate quantities of the book, *Spiritual Kindergarten* were ordered. *Shalom: Twelve Steps to Wholeness*

was sent to a printing company to be published. During this same time period, the pilot project participants were recruited. The class was filled with fifty-two members and was subsequently closed to new participants. The pilot project launched on October 21, 2013 and ran for twenty weeks until March 17, 2014 (with a two-week hiatus for Christmas.) At the beginning of the project, all participants completed a pre-course survey, in order to provide a baseline for evaluation. At the end of the initiative, the members assessed the initiative with a post-course evaluation. On March 31, 2014, two weeks after the conclusion of the project, the leaders met for an evaluation session to review the results of the evaluations of the ministry initiative.

Training of Leadership

Careful attention was given to leadership recruitment. After prayer and consultation with the pastoral staff of the congregation, leaders were selected according to their spiritual gifts, their life experience, and their Christian maturity. Each person was asked to share in co-leadership of a small group, to complete all weekly assignments, and to participate in preparation of the weekly gathering. Each of the leaders was asked to provide a ten to fifteen minute personal testimony of their experience with one of the Twelve Steps to share with the entire group. This was a particular challenge for several of the leaders who had no previous personal knowledge of the Twelve Steps. Yet, each one acknowledged that when they had agreed to leadership, they had also decided to be open to the new experiences and challenges that this might bring to their lives.

The preparatory leader training included two half-day leader retreats. Beginning with a community meal, we modeled a similar environment to what would occur during

our weekly *Shalom* sessions. During the leader retreats, we spent time on team building with personal sharing, teaching on the Twelve Steps, and introduction to the curriculum and resources being used, sharing expectations, and completing preparatory assignments for the individual sessions.

Each of the twelve recruited small group leaders provided excellent leadership from their recruitment through the completion of the initiative. Their commitment to the project, their personal testimonies, their weekly preparation, and their gifts of hospitality were assets to this ministry project. In addition, three of the leaders took on extra responsibilities in facilitating the large group experiential activities. The leaders also engaged in weekly one-hour meetings to share their own personal growth through the study and the leadership challenges they faced in their small groups. This time was also used to make adjustments to the content and format of the weekly small and large group sessions, as needed.

Additional Material Resources

The large number of participants combined with the other programs occurring on Monday evenings at Jupiter First Church limited the choice of the physical space in which to hold this class. The only option available was one large room in the adult education building, which was set up with six round tables for the small groups and tables at the rear of the room for the community meal. A podium with a microphone was available for the weekly leader testimony, as well as a full audio-visual system for the large group activities. While both leaders and participants expressed the desire for more private space for the small groups as well as some frustration with the noise levels in the

room, we had to compromise on this issue, as no other space was available on the campus.

All participants contributed to the cost of the class, which covered the majority of the budget for the project. The materials not covered were subsidized by the spiritual formation category of the overall church budget. The team leaders then compiled a comprehensive resource list, including audio-visual needs and extra materials supplies. The leadership team divided the tasks to be completed and then volunteered to procure the needed resources. The church technical staff provided the support for all computer and audio-visual requirements. The support staff at Jupiter First Church facilitated with communication via email, website information, and telephone, as well as by producing all additional written materials.

Review of the Ministry Initiative

The initial registration for this course was fifty-two participants. By the end of the study, four participants had dropped from the class. Two persons indicated that they could not identify with the Twelve Steps; one communicated that she was addressing health issues and did not have the stamina to complete the class; and one person had a relapse into alcoholism. In this case, two of the small group leaders attempted to reach out to him but he did not respond to their contacts. However, his wife remained in the class, indicating that her small group provided invaluable support through her family's challenge.

The class met each week for two hours and fifteen minutes. Each session began with a community meal prepared by one of the small groups on a rotating basis. The

content of the evening commenced with one of the leader's sharing a testimony on the step under consideration that week. This was followed by a small group discussion on the participants' homework from the week. The class concluded with a large group experiential exercise and a large group closing prayer.

At the first session, the team leaders introduced the ministry initiative, describing the Twelve Steps as one model of spiritual formation. The team leader shared her personal testimony along with the goals for this ministry initiative. Several of the team members presented information about the program including a brief history of the Twelve Steps and its roots in Christian spiritual formation and the Scripture associated with the Twelve Steps. The participants engaged in a Bible study in small groups and the leaders described the *Shalom: Twelve Steps to Wholeness* curriculum in detail. The small groups reviewed guidelines for confidentiality and shared their hopes for the study.¹

The small group facilitators reviewed the participant's weekly homework in detail by leading them through their first week's daily assignments. On day one, the participants were asked to read the Step Reflections detailed in the *Shalom* participant guide. On days two through four, they covered the chapter on that particular step in the *Spiritual Kindergarten* book. Day five was a day of journaling on the Questions for Reflection in the *Shalom* guide. Day six was designated as the day for exploration of the spiritual discipline related to the step of the week. Day seven was intended for Sabbath reflection and prayer on the weekly assignments. This pattern continued throughout the twenty weeks of the ministry initiative.

¹ The confidentiality guidelines are available in the Appendices. These small group guidelines were repeated weekly for the first few weeks, in order to emphasize the importance of the concepts so that participants might experience a sense of emotional safety in the small groups.

Assessment Plan

The assessment process included both a pre-course survey and a post-course evaluation, which were created with guidance from *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*.² These assessments allowed me to do some comparisons between pre-course knowledge and post-course learning. All fifty-two participants completed the pre-course survey. However, because of absences in the class due to spring break, only thirty-eight persons completed the post-course evaluation. In addition, all leaders and participants were invited to share what they had learned in the last session when they were asked to respond to two questions: “What has God taught you through this course?” and “What next steps are you being led to take?” Two of the small group facilitators took careful notes during that time of sharing in order to aid this evaluation process. Two weeks after the completion of the course, the leadership team met to listen to all of the evaluative comments. Many had also written their assessments and provided them in advance of this meeting to contribute to this process of assessment.

Presentation of Pre-Course Survey Results

At the first session, all participants completed the pre-course survey consisting of six questions. The results of that assessment are listed below.

Question One: How much knowledge do you have about the Twelve Steps?

² Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 220-226.

Table 1. Knowledge of the Twelve Steps

	Little Twelve Step Experience	Some Twelve Step Experience	Past or Current Twelve Step Experience
Twelve Step Experience (Percent Reporting)	29%	27%	44%

Question Two: Are you involved in a Twelve Step recovery group at the present time? Of the eleven participants involved in Twelve Step groups currently, most reported attendance approximately once a week, but two of the participants stated that they attend meetings three to five times per week. The length of time the persons have been involved in Twelve Step programs varied from ten months to twenty-nine years.

Question Three: Check which spiritual practices are natural parts of your life at this time. The participants were given thirteen broad categories and were also offered an option to add another not on the specified list. However, there were few additions to this listing. The results are as follows:

Table 2. Pre-course daily spiritual practices

Pre-Course Daly Spiritual Practices	Participants Practicing
Prayer	98%
Gratitude	77%
Practicing the Presence of God	58%
Silence	58%
Daily Bible Reading	52%
Blessing Enemies	52%
Confession	35%
Daily Spiritual Inventory	25%
Scriptural Meditation	42%
Journaling	37%
Prayer of <i>Examen</i>	13%
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	7%

The top six responses, which were all above 50 percent, were spiritual practices that have been repeatedly emphasized in previous spiritual formation classes at Jupiter First Church.

Question Four: Which classes have you taken before in the area of spiritual growth? This was an open-ended question to which the respondents filled in an answer. While thirteen different classes were mentioned, the great majority of the participants had been involved in one or more of three popular classes at Jupiter First Church. Thirty-four of the participants (67 percent) in *Shalom* had also taken a thirty-week course on spiritual formation entitled *Companions in Christ*.³ Twenty-eight persons (55 percent) had completed one or more of the *Disciple* courses, which are overviews of the Scripture lasting from twenty-eight to thirty-four weeks.⁴ Nineteen (37 percent) of the members had participated in either *The Good and Beautiful Life*⁵ or *The Good and Beautiful Community*⁶ classes. Both of these courses lasted twelve weeks and included Bible study, daily readings, and experiential exercises for the participants. This information was somewhat surprising, as the leadership team had not anticipated that the *Shalom* project would attract so many persons who had previous spiritual formation class experience.

³ Gerrit Dawson, Adele Gonzalez, E. Glenn Hinson, Reuben Job, Marjorie Thompson, and Wendy Wright, *Companions in Christ: A Small Group Experience in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2006).

⁴ Richard Byrd Wilke and Julia Kitchens Wilke, *Disciple: Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

⁵ James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Life: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009).

⁶ James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community: Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010).

Question Five: What led you to choose to participate in this group? This question offered seven possible responses, along with one to be specified by the respondents. The results are as follows:

Table 3. Stated reasons for enrolling in *Shalom* class

Reasons for Joining <i>Shalom</i>	Responses
I want to learn more about the Twelve Steps	29%
I want to grow in my Christian faith	77%
I have a family member/friend who is dealing with addiction	31%
I want to understand Christian connection to the Twelve Steps	54%
I want to understand my own addictive/compulsive tendencies	50%
I want to be a part of a small group of Christians growing together	75%
I want to be a part of a study and this sounded appealing	27%

The rank order of the responses was interesting to note. The most compelling reasons that the participants chose to be a part of *Shalom* were about spiritual formation and community. The clearest response was that they wanted to grow in their Christian faith (77 percent), followed by a desire to be a part of a small group of Christians growing together (75 percent). The next grouping of responses was correlated to the Twelve Steps, with 54 percent wanting to understand the connection between the Christian faith and the Twelve Steps, and 50 percent of the members desiring to understand their own compulsive and addictive behaviors. Of personal interest were the three respondents who indicated the reason that they joined the study was to support the team leader in this ministry initiative.

Question Six: What two words describe your hope for this group? This open-ended question garnered fewer answers, with only sixteen persons responding. Seven people indicated “spiritual renewal” or “spiritual growth,” and three penned “Christian

connections.” The rest of the responses included phrases, such as “strength,” “healing peace,” “spiritual awakening,” and “healing forgiveness.”

Presentation of Post-Course Evaluation Results

At the nineteenth session of the class, the participants were asked to complete a post-course evaluation, to which thirty-eight persons responded. Unfortunately, for the purpose of assessment, this day had the highest absentee rate of the entire ministry project. Eight questions were included in this assessment, with one additional space for general comments on improving the class for future participants.

Question One: How much knowledge did you have about the Twelve Steps when you began this course? This question was a repetition of the pre-course survey question. Not surprisingly, the responses were similar to the previous answers, with some subtle shifts, which could be the result of a smaller sample size reporting.

Table 4. Stated Twelve Step experience

	Little Twelve Step Experience	Some Twelve Step Experience	Past or Current Twelve Step Experience
Twelve Step Experience	37%	24%	39%

Question Two: What percentage of the classes have you attended?

Table 5. Attendance at classes

	Less than 40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100%
Attendance	0%	2%	4%	94%

This number may have been skewed by the absentee rate on this class night. On average, at each class, the attendance was between forty and forty-eight persons.

Question Three: What percentage of the homework were you able to complete?

Table 6. Completion of homework

	Less than 40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100%
Homework Completion	0%	0%	19%	81%

From observations of the small groups, and in discussion with the other leaders, the general consensus was that most people attempted to do the homework, yet often found it difficult to complete some of the more challenging parts of the study.

Question Four: Did this program increase your interest in practicing the Twelve Steps?

Table 7. Post-course interest in practice of the Twelve Steps

	Not at all	Some	Very Much
Increased Interest in Practicing Twelve Steps	2%	35%	63%

Clearly, this study increased the participants' interest in continuing to practice some aspects of the Twelve Steps. It would have been informative to ask which of the Twelve Steps had been most helpful in increasing spiritual wholeness over the course of *Shalom*.

Question Five: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being highly unlikely and 10 being highly likely, how likely are you to continue practicing the Twelve Steps in your process of spiritual growth? The responses to this question ranged from 2 to 10. The results are in mean numbers.

Table 8: Likelihood to continue practice of the Twelve Steps

Likely to Practice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Respondents		1		1	1		3	13	3	15

In this question, the responses were broken down a little more, correlating those who had little Twelve Step experience with those who were familiar with the Twelve Steps. Three of the participants who had little familiarity with the Twelve Steps at the beginning of this class reported the lowest likelihood of continuing to practice the Twelve Steps, marking in the 2 to 5 range on the scale. The rest of the members marked their responses in the 7 to 10 range.

Question Six: Did this program increase your interest in practicing spiritual disciplines?

Table 9. Post-course interest in practice of spiritual disciplines

	Not at All	Some	Very Much
Increased Interest in Practice of Spiritual Disciplines	0%	18%	72%

Not all respondents answered this question, so the answers do not equal 100 percent. However, the participants indicated a desire to continue practicing at least some of the spiritual disciplines presented through *Shalom*.

Question Seven: Check which spiritual practices are natural parts of your life at this time. This question mirrored the same question in the pre-course survey.

Table 10. Post-course practice of spiritual disciplines

Post-Course Daily Spiritual Practices	Participants Practicing
Prayer	97%
Gratitude	87%
Practicing the Presence of God	76%
Silence	71%
Blessing Enemies	55%
Confession	50%
Daily Spiritual Inventory	50%
Scriptural Meditation	50%
Daily Bible Reading	47%
Contemplation	47%
Journaling	32%
Prayer of <i>Examen</i>	16%
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	11%

A further comparison of the pre-course survey and the post-course evaluation in this category will be further addressed in the next section of this chapter.

Question Eight: What were the most helpful parts for you own spiritual growth in this study? The respondents had the option to choose more than one response, thus the percentages do not equal 100 percent.

Table 11. Ranking of components in *Shalom*

Most Helpful Parts of <i>Shalom</i> study	Percentage of Participants Responding
Small Group Interactions	89%
Leader's Personal Testimonies	79%
Study Guide Questions for Reflection	74%
Daily Personal Study	45%
Spiritual Kindergarten book	45%
Study Guide Spiritual Discipline to be Explored	45%

The most helpful parts of *Shalom* for the participants appeared to be the community engendered in the small groups, the authenticity and vulnerability associated with the

leader's testimonies, and the opportunities for reflection on the material presented each week.

The ninth question offered the respondents the opportunity to comment on ways to improve the class in the future. The comments were wide ranging, but some key themes emerged. In the category of general observation, many commented that the Twelve Steps were presented in a fresh way that encouraged open, honest, and authentic discussion in the small groups. On the curriculum, some stated that the twenty weeks was an adequate number of sessions to address the topic, others thought it might be too long. Several who had little experience with the Twelve Steps mentioned that the middle section, including the steps of personal inventory, confession, and making amends were difficult to comprehend and complete. Several suggested that the weekly spiritual discipline should be described on the first day so that it could be practiced throughout the week. Some who described themselves as initially resistant to mixed gender groups found this to be one of the highlights of the small group experience.

The most consistent critique focused on the physical space in which the class was held. Many respondents commented that the size of the room was too small to hold the number of participants enrolled. Although six tables easily fit into the room, the noise level was often distracting. Several members expressed discomfort with a fear of being overheard by other table groups, which contributed to a concern that confidentiality might be breached. Many voiced a hope for a smaller large group in the future, as well as separate private spaces in which the small groups could meet. The leader's personal testimonies, the small group interactions, and the large group experiential exercises were highly valued by the majority of the respondents.

Comparison of Pre-Course and Post-Course Findings

While the rank ordering of the first four spiritual practices remained the same, the increases appeared to be significant in many cases. The spiritual disciplines, which the participants reported the greatest increase in practice, were daily spiritual inventory (+25 percent), practicing the presence of God (+18 percent), confession (+15 percent), silence (+13 percent), and gratitude (+10 percent). Participants acknowledged that they had grown in both greater understanding and more consistent practice of these spiritual disciplines.

Table 12. Pre-course to post-course changes in spiritual practices

Spiritual Practice	Pre-Course	Post-Course	Percentage Change
Prayer	98%	97%	-1%
Gratitude	77%	87%	+10%
Practicing Presence of God	58%	76%	+18%
Silence	58%	71%	+13%
Daily Bible Reading	52%	47%	-5%
Blessing Enemies	52%	55%	+3%
Confession	35%	50%	+15%
Daily Spiritual Inventory	25%	50%	+25%
Scriptural Meditation	42%	50%	+8%
Journaling	37%	32%	-5%
Prayer of <i>Examen</i>	13%	16%	-3%
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	7%	11%	+4%

Leader Evaluations

The leaders met for an evaluation meeting and reviewed the results of the post-course evaluations. Their comments reinforced the results of those assessments with a few additions. The leaders suggested meeting for a longer period of time prior to the start of the class so that they could work through all aspects of the course before leading it for

others. Several noted that the leaders should offer more detailed explanations of Steps Four and Five, which focused on moral inventories. This aspect of the study seemed to offer the greatest challenge for all participants. Many of the leaders reported that the highlight of this class for them was the weekly leader meeting, in which they were able to share their own growth with each other.

Revision of Small Group Program

Based on both the participant and leader feedback, this course will continue to be offered at Jupiter First Church, with some changes to both the content and the format of this ministry initiative. The first issue to be addressed is the expectations of the participants. It will be important to clarify the content and the process of this class. Some indicated that they were unaware of the depth to which the Twelve Steps would challenge them. As a result, the leaders noticed some of the participants either physically or emotionally detaching from the group during some of the more difficult assignments. It might be helpful for the leaders to communicate the nature of the class to future participants in a personal conversation before the course commences.

As to the content, adjustments will be made to both the *Shalom* leader and participant guides. Some simple clarifications of the wording in both books will help in communicating the concepts more effectively. This will be significant especially for the first week's meeting, in which the essential concepts of the program are articulated. In addition, some of the large group experiential exercises will be reworked to improve them with some additional clarification.

As for the format, some recommended changes will be fashioned to enhance the program. In the future, the group size will be smaller, both in the overall class and in the small groups, with no more than seven members in a group, including the co-leaders, and no more than twenty-eight in the classroom. If possible, more intimate small group gathering spaces will be provided to address the issue of both the noise level and confidentiality. Consideration will be given to recruiting some persons experienced in the Twelve Steps to act as sponsors, if requested, in order to help participants to more effectively navigate some of the more difficult parts of the Twelve Step process.

It was evident that many of the participants in *Shalom* were strongly invested in the group process. Without exception, these persons reported positive results in growth in relationship with self, with others, and with God. On the other hand, some who were highly challenged by the material struggled with seeing the positive returns in their spiritual growth. While the participants and team leaders saw some positive transformation happen over the course of twenty weeks, it will be much more interesting to observe the longer term results in the participants' lives. Some acknowledged that they had just begun to understand the impact of the Twelve Step process on their personal and relational transformation. It has been difficult to assess the extent to which participants experienced growth in wholeness. It is not something that can easily be quantitatively measured. Rather, the spoken testimonies by the participants confirmed their awareness of an increasing integration and wholeness, the depth of community they had experienced, and the improvement they had witnessed in many of their relationships. It is always important to remember that every spiritual formation process proceeds according to God's timing in a journey that lasts an entire lifetime. In assessing the impact of

Shalom, the apostle Paul's words to the church at Corinth are encouraging: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." (I Cor. 3:7)

CONCLUSION

Mulholland fittingly summarizes this journey of spiritual formation toward wholeness for each disciple of Christ: “The journey of faith, the path to spiritual wholeness, lies in our increasingly faithful response to the One whose purpose shapes our path, whose grace redeems our detours, whose power liberates us from the crippling bondages of our previous journey, and whose transforming presence meets us at each turn in the road. Holistic spirituality is a pilgrimage of deepening responsiveness to God’s control of our life and being.”¹ As I gratefully reflect on the conclusion of this ministry project at Jupiter First Church, I am also aware that in many ways, the journey of transformation through the practice of the Twelve Steps for the members of *Shalom* has just begun. This project is complete, but the work of God is still unfolding in fifty-two participants’ lives. I pray that each one is discovering a renewed sense of personal wholeness and depth in all of their relationships as they trust in God’s way and in God’s timing. May reminded us about the unique nature of the spiritual growth process with these words: “Spiritual growth is different. It cannot be packaged, programmed, or taught. Although some new facts and representations may help us along the way, the essential process is one of transformation, not education. It is, if anything, an unlearning process in which our old ways are cleansed, liberated, and redeemed.”²

One anonymous practitioner who was reflecting on the Twelve Steps expressed the hope of this journey: “When a man or a woman has a spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which

¹ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 168.

² May, *Addiction and Grace*, 105.

he could not do before on his resources alone. . . In a very real sense, he has been transformed. . . What he has received is a free gift, and yet usually, at least in some small part, he has made himself ready to receive it.”³ It is my hope that each participant who invested in the process of *Shalom* will ultimately experience increased personal wholeness and deepened relationships with God and with other people as they practice these principles one day at a time.

We began this initiative by posing a few questions for reflection. What is the theological foundation underpinning the Twelve Steps? How might that fit into a model of Christian spiritual formation for adults at Jupiter First Church? We have discovered that a rich historical and theological foundation undergirds the Twelve Step process of recovery, all of which is rooted in Scripture and the classical spiritual practices. Recognizing the Christian roots of this spiritual formation process and teaching the principles of the Twelve Steps led many of the *Shalom* participants on a deeper exploration of their relationship with themselves, with God, and with other people.

We considered: How can we utilize the best of the Twelve Step recovery movement and combine it with traditional Christian spiritual formation principles and practices in order to encourage a deeper sense of human wholeness? This process unfolded for many of the participants in *Shalom* in ways that brought them closer to God in more meaningful surrender in more and more areas of their lives. This journey empowered persons to reflect more honestly on their own attitudes, motives, and actions, by turning to God for growth in transformation into a reflection of Jesus Christ. We pondered the question: How can the church more effectively empower disciples to be

³ Anonymous, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 106-107.

conformed to the image of Christ and impact their worlds for him? This question can only be answered over the course of time as persons practice the principles of the Twelve Steps in each part of their lives.

Throughout this project, I have come to a deeper conviction that The Twelve Step process as a pathway of spiritual formation can only thrive in a grace-drenched atmosphere. Jupiter First Church seeks to offer that kind of environment in every program that it offers. Thus, this ministry initiative that allows persons to begin wherever they are on this journey, became a natural fit for this congregation. One of my personal hopes was that I might offer my own experience and deep enthusiasm for practicing the Twelve Steps as one powerful pathway of growth into Christian wholeness with others in the Church.

As we move forward in the refinement of this spiritual formation program, I believe that the body of Christ will see the transformational potential of the Twelve Steps in disciples' lives. First, we will witness more openness, honesty, vulnerability, and authenticity as people begin to claim the freedom of living and growing in Christ in an honest and open community of faith. As one of the participants testified: "This resonated with me. It's special to be a part of a group that admits we aren't perfect, and that we all have problems. That's hard because I want people to like me. I wanted these people to accept me even more than my non-Christian friends. And here, I discovered that I can be real." Another person new to the Twelve Steps shared this testimony: "Intimacy developed by unbelievably honest people exposing themselves to each other with freedom. At first it seemed so abnormal but also richly powerful and wonderful. It made

me realize that people want to be more real and authentic. I realized we all need each other. And I realized I need God more.”

Offering a journey through the Twelve Steps as one model of transformation will continue to provide the tools for a deeper surrender to God in more and more areas of life. Many who believed that they had already surrendered their lives to Christ at the point of their conversions found that they were being called to surrender more aspects of themselves than they had ever done before. On this subject, one participant testified: “This was a big surprise for me. I thought I had done the first three steps before. I found that through this class I surrendered to God on a deeper and richer level. I am putting trust at God’s door rather than my own. I am waiting for His door to open. I have learned that I am enough. I don’t have to be everything to everyone. I have a deeper connection with God and am very grateful for that.”

Disciples who continue to practice the Twelve Steps will know the freedom of deeper character change. Far too many persons within the Body of Christ experience entrapment in behavioral patterns that are resistant to change. As one of the participants in *Shalom* stated: “The Lord is in the redemption business. And so God surrounds me with people who need to hear my past to help them. It sounds overwhelming at first, but once it starts, it becomes second nature. All the time spent together each week, and doing the homework, reinforced what I thought I knew, and brought it to a deeper level. So I am taller than when I first started.” Many of the participants commented that the attitudes and patterns that seemed to be a part of their intrinsic nature were beginning to be transformed as they asked God for help in removing those shortcomings. However, the changes were not solely focused on negative defects, but rather also on an increasing

awareness of character strengths as well. Another person stated: “I had a chance to do the Twelve Steps before in my professional work, but I never really did them for myself. This time, through *Shalom*, I have experienced peace. It has affected my relationship with myself. I’m more authentic, genuine, and real. It has impacted me at the deepest level of who I am in Christ.”

Utilizing the Twelve Steps as a means of spiritual formation in the Church fosters a deeper and richer sense of community. Johnson penned: “The experience of the Twelve Steps, like that of the Christian church, is based on the assumption that God is in fact real, alive, and capable of revealing himself as he truly is through personal relationships with people in a community of faith.”⁴ The participants in *Shalom* repeatedly celebrated the gift of community that they had experienced. One member affirmed: “I’ve been involved in the Twelve Steps before. Timing is everything. I’ve been trying to fix my son, and this course helped me to look first at myself. I got support from my group. I realized I was enabling, and I had to let him go. And I have been. I am now encouraging my son, supporting him, and I gave the rest to God.” Many of the participants recognized and reaffirmed their need for community in the journey of transformation. For some, this was a first experience of authentic community, and it proved to be a powerful encouragement to deepening spiritual growth. One participant hesitantly yet courageously spoke: “I never thought I needed the Twelve Steps. But, I always felt our church was on a great spiritual cruise ship, and that I had missed the boat and was left standing on the deck. I didn’t have a deep church background as a child. I’ve learned that I’m not as bad as I thought I was. I made the lower deck on the cruise ship! And now, I’m learning to climb up, using the

⁴ Johnson, “Intentionality of the Heart,” 60.

Twelve Step staircase.” Wherever the participants started in this *Shalom* journey, it was evident that a sense of authentic community emerged which facilitated personal transformation.

Each week, the participants in this study shared their daily awareness of a deepening connection with God. One of the participants affirmed: “Since starting this study, I’ve been led back to a place of peace. I now have more strength from God. God is my reality, everything else is just noise.” On the power of God at work in and through the Twelve Steps, Johnson penned: “Out of such shared life in Christ, union with God and transformation into Christlikeness can emerge. But life can be shared this way only when God’s grace is conspicuous in the content of what we believe and teach, in how we approach God, one another, and our own brokenness, and in flexible, individualized methods that speak of God’s relational way of being with us.” That is the hope and that is the goal of this ministry project.

While the Church will gain a cadre of disciples who are being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit as they practice the Twelve Steps, some concerns linger about this process of spiritual growth. It is important to note that there is no “one size fits all” model of spiritual formation. For those who come to embrace this Twelve Step approach, the model can prove to be truly transformational in their lives. Yet for many others, the call to deeply explore one’s past and present attitudes, behaviors, and motivations can be daunting. Many have a difficult time understanding a sense of powerlessness without an obvious external addiction. Many are not interested in, or able to identify with the Twelve Steps as a model of spiritual growth, either because of the principles, the wording, or the practice of these spiritual disciplines. Jupiter First Church will continue to offer a

multitude of models and means of spiritual formation, with a Twelve Step model of spiritual formation being one option for those who choose it.

An additional concern is that this process is difficult to complete in twenty weeks. Those who are involved in Twelve Step programs in the community take much more time in working through the steps, both on their own, and with a sponsor. While the small group process offers the power of an authentic community, some people prefer to share more deeply in one-to-one relationships, either because of the nature of their personality or their past life experience. For some people, the depth of self-discovery and sharing required in a Twelve Step program like this might be better served through a sponsor and friend relationship.

As this season in the journey through *Shalom* comes to its conclusion, let me leave you with a prayer of Robert Mulholland that mirrors my own for each participant in *Shalom*: “It is my prayer that you have heard God speaking to you, in through, and around all that we have shared. I pray that you have a clearer understanding of the spiritual journey and a hunger to enter more fully into the pilgrimage toward wholeness in Christ that God has for you. May God richly bless you as you move forward on the journey.”⁵ *Shalom*.

⁵ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 168.

APPENDIX A

Twelve Steps¹ and Scripture

STEP ONE: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (or fill in the blank) – that our lives had become unmanageable.

“For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.” (Romans 7:18)

STEP TWO: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

“For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Philippians. 2:13)

STEP THREE: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1)

STEP FOUR: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

STEP FIVE: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

“Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

STEP SIX: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” (James 4:10)

STEP SEVEN: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9)

¹ Anonymous. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 5-9.

STEP EIGHT: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31)

STEP NINE: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

“So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matt. 5:23-24)

STEP TEN: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

“So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.” (I Cor. 10:12)

STEP ELEVEN: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” (Col. 3:16a)

STEP TWELVE: Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17)

APPENDIX B

Small Group Discussion Guidelines

- Speak only for yourself about beliefs, feelings, and responses.
- Respect and receive what others offer, even if you disagree.
- **Listening** is more important than talking. Avoid cross-talking, interrupting, speaking for others, or trying to “fix” another person’s problems.
- Honor the different ways God works in individuals.
- Allow for silent moments. God may be speaking.
- Maintain confidentiality. What is shared in the group stays in the group.
- Recognize that all group members have permission to share only what and when they are ready to share.

APPENDIX C

Shalom: Twelve Steps to Wholeness **Week 12: Participant Guide**

Step 8

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Scripture

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31, NRSV):

Quotes and Notes

“Steps Eight and Nine are concerned with personal relationships. First we take a look backward and try to discover where we have been at fault; next we make a vigorous attempt to repair the damage we have done; and third, having thus cleaned away the debris of the past, we consider how, with our newfound knowledge of ourselves, we may develop the best possible relations with every human being we know.” (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 77)

Weekly Assignment

Day 1: Study Guide: Read Step Reflections.

Day 2: Spiritual Kindergarten, p. 63-66. Reflect in prayer. Write any notes.

Day 3: Spiritual Kindergarten, p. 66-69. Do Step Bible Study. Reflect in prayer. Write any notes.

Day 4: Spiritual Kindergarten, p. 70. Read and reflect.

Day 5: Study Guide. Respond to the Questions for Reflection. Journal on that exercise.

Day 6: Study Guide. Read about Spiritual discipline to be explored. Practice that exercise. Reflect on that experience.

Day 7: Rest and reflection.

Prayer Items

Step 8 Reflections:

The first seven steps helped us to focus on a deeper relationship with God (Steps 1-3), and a more honest relationship with ourselves (Steps 4-7). In Step Eight, we begin the process of allowing God to bring peace to our relationships with other people. Many of the strategies that we have used in our relationships with others have not worked. Many of us have rationalized our behaviors, blamed others, pretended that the problems did not exist, or manipulated people for our purposes. We could add many other behaviors to that list of dysfunctional strategies if we are honest with ourselves. Steps Eight and Nine teach us that the way out of the pain is through the pain. It is as if God says to us after the Seventh Step, “You want me to take all of your character defects, but I also want you to see that your character defects have impacted other people. And in order to heal, I want you to go back and cleanup your side of the street. Then you will begin to know the freedom I have in store for you.”

“Step Eight is basically an exercise in honesty with oneself in making a list of all that one has done. It is an exercise of self-knowledge. Then what you do after that is subject to the norms of common sense and whether making amends would be effective or make the situation worse.” (Thomas Keating, *Divine Therapy and Addiction*, 119.) This step calls us to make a list trusting that God will lead us in this undertaking.

While this step is quite simple, most people realize that it is not easy. To make a list of all persons we have hurt often triggers some of the very unhealthy behaviors we have already employed – such as defensiveness, avoidance, criticism, anger, and blame. That is why it is so important to begin with the first three steps. Step Eight is virtually impossible without the partnership of God. It is too difficult for most of us to compile a list of the harms we have done to others unless we have first experienced the grace of God in our lives.

The key word for this week in Step Eight is “willing.” For many of us who work through this step, we become aware of not only the ones we have harmed, but also those who have harmed us. In human relationships, actions are reactions are always part of an elaborate dance between persons, in which one person’s action feeds another person’s reaction until a cycle of either positive or negative interaction develops.

In compiling a list of persons we have harmed, it is not unusual to find that the ones we believe we have harmed are also ones we feel have harmed us in some way. However, as true as that might be, the focus of this step is our part in the interaction. We are responsible only for our own attitudes and behaviors, not on anyone else’s actions. We often become caught in this step when the harm done to us seems much more significant than the harm that we have done to another. Becoming willing to make amends turns out to be much easier when we can do the work of forgiveness first. Corrie Ten Boom’s words are instructive here: “For forgive is to set the prisoner free, and to realize the prisoner was you.” Once we can work through the process of letting go of a resentment through forgiveness, we are often able to move through this Eighth Step.

Journal Questions for Reflection:

What concerns have been raised in you as you consider this step?

What fears limit you from living the life God wants for you?

What attitudes get in the way of your relationship with God and others?

What resentments still linger in your heart? To discover the answer to this question, think about the people you avoid, or the situations that you put out of your mind.

Spiritual Discipline to be Explored: *Self Examination*

Set aside some time for self-examination. In the presence of God, ask for light to pierce your darkness.

Then ask yourself: *Who have I recently injured through thoughtlessness, neglect, anger, control, or manipulation?*

As the Holy Spirit brings a person to mind, confess your feelings about that person to God. Ask God to forgive you and if need be, to give you the grace to forgive him or her.

Remember to be prayerful about what God is calling you to do next. Sometimes, the situation is not a safe one in which to reach out. God will lead you. If so led, consider writing an apology, making a phone call, or confessing your part to the person in an attempt to put the relationship back on track. (Adel Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 93).

Notes:

APPENDIX D

Leader's Guide Week 12 Step 8A **Stage 3: Peace with Others** **Step 8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed,** **and became willing to make amends to them all.**

Opening: (7:10-7:15)

The first seven steps helped us to establish the beginning of a more peaceful relationship with God (Steps 1-3) and with ourselves (Steps 4-7). This week we begin Stage Three, the process of establishing a more peaceful relationship with others. Step 8 challenges us to be honest with ourselves as we dive back into that house we built, and make a careful account of how all those hidden rooms and boxes in our attic, all those shortcomings have harmed other people. Easy? No, especially since most of the people we have harmed, probably have hurt us as well. Step 8 is impossible without God's help. However, with God's help, we can experience the truth in Corrie Ten Boom's words: "To forgive is to set the prisoner free, and to realize the prisoner was you." Did you put your name at the top of the list of people you have harmed?

Join me in prayer as we light this candle. Lord, this light is as an ever-present reminder that your Holy Spirit is always with us; we are the one who gets disconnected, not You. Help us to keep our hearts and minds open so we can be aware of how you are at work in our midst, every minute of every day.

Reflection on weekly assignments (7:15-8:00)

Invite any insights or questions from the week's readings in general before you turn to the questions in the text and study guide. Use the group member's comments to transition into the relevant questions.

What concerns have been raised in you as you consider this step?

How would you describe your current willingness to make a list of people you have harmed?

What fears might get in the way of your willingness to make amends?

Discussion of Luke 6:37-42: Why do you think the text directed us to Jesus' teaching on judgment, when this Step 8 is about making a list of people we have harmed?

Lead the group through all the text questions p 67-69 in *Spiritual Kindergarten*.

How will making amends help you be freed from your resentments or shame?

Why is forgiving yourself an important part of this process of making amends?

Discussion of the Exploration of the Spiritual Discipline:

How was your experience with self-examination in the presence of God....asking for light to pierce your defenses?

Were you able to follow through on something recent, and do something to make amends? How did it unfold?

Deeper Explorations (8:00-8:30)

Part I: Our Own Emotional Baggage Bag (20 min)

We are going to create an outward symbol of our progress as we make amends to the people on our list. These people and situations are often like heavy items in a bag we have to drag around with us each day; we sometimes call these burdens emotional baggage. Releasing the weight seems like an impossible task... but not if we empty our bags one item at a time. We are going to create our very own emotional baggage bag.

You will see a bowl of glass beads (the kind with one flat side) and some Sharpie markers on the table, and dark bags.

Make a symbol or letter for each person on your amends list on the bead. When the ink is dry, put the beads in the dark bag.

Ask the participants to put the bag in their pocket – if they don't have a pocket, then in their purse...someplace where they will have to carry it around every single day as a reminder of the amends work that needs to be done.

Now give each person a second pouch. . . a pure white one

When you actually make amends, which is Step 9, rub the letter or symbol off the bead, and move it to the white bag.

Keep the white bag someplace where you will see it every day, as a reminder of the progress you are making.

Keep all the beads and bags. We will use them at a later date.

Reminder to the group members: bring your emotional baggage bag everywhere you go, especially here. Who knows? We may need to add new glass beads as God reveals things we have kept buried in those closets and corners of our lives, and in those boxes way back in the attic that we haven't opened since---since who knows when?

Part 2: Prayer for strength to do Step Eight (10 min)

Ask everyone to open to the lists they made for Step Eight in Action (text p 70). We were instructed to use our Fourth Step inventory to help us make a list of the people we have harmed. Refer to your list for a moment before we pray together...

Lead the whole group in prayer....something like. . . “Lord, we need your strength to visit the situations involving the people we put on our list for making amends. Be with us, now.

Close your eyes, take a deep breath. (Pause a minute)

Who is the first person that comes to mind from your list? Think about the situation. (Pause)

How do you feel about this person? Are you angry, hurt, and fearful? Remorseful?

Bring your feelings to God, talk to Him. . . . God is right here.

Ask God to show you the barriers that stand in the way of your willingness to make amends.

Ask God to help you work through those barriers, one at a time. (Pause)

Now picture this person, and pray for him or her. (Pause)

Lord, we don't have the strength to do this step on our own. It's hard to even make the list! Help each one of us repeat this prayer with you, as many times as necessary until we are ready to actually make amends to this person. Give us strength to abandon our old patterns of avoiding pain; lead us as we prepare to go through it, and be with us as we actually come face to face with this person and make amends, In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer Concerns: (8:30-8:40)

Join Large Group for Closing Prayer (8:40-8:45)

Materials: Glass beads with flat side, Sharpie pens, two pouches per person

APPENDIX E

Pre-Course Survey

Shalom: 12 Steps to Wholeness

1. How much knowledge do you have about the Twelve-steps? (Check one)
- ☐ Very little knowledge about them
- ☐ Familiar with some of them
- ☐ I have been in a Twelve-step program in the past
- ☐ I am involved in a Twelve-step program currently

2. Are you involved in a Twelve-step recovery group at the present time?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, how often do you attend? _____

If yes, for how long have you been a part of one? _____

3. Check which spiritual practices are natural parts of your life at this time?
- ☐ Prayer
- ☐ Lectio Divina
- ☐ Silence
- ☐ Scriptural meditation
- ☐ Journaling
- ☐ Daily Spiritual Inventory
- ☐ Prayer of Examen
- ☐ Confession
- ☐ Blessing our Enemies
- ☐ Practicing the Presence of God
- ☐ Contemplation
- ☐ Gratitude
- ☐ Daily Bible reading
- ☐ Others (List them)

4. Which classes have you taken before in the area of spiritual growth? (List them)

5. What led you to choose to participate in this group? (Check ones that apply)

- ☐ I want to learn more about the Twelve Steps
- ☐ I want to grow in my Christian faith
- ☐ I have a family member/friend who is dealing with addiction
- ☐ I want to understand the Christian connection to the Twelve Steps
- ☐ I want to understand my own addictive/compulsive tendencies
- ☐ I want to be a part of a small group of Christians growing together
- ☐ I wanted to be a part of a study and this sounded appealing
- ☐ Other (specify your own response)

6. What two words describe your hope for this group?

Thank you for your participation in this study.

APPENDIX F

Post Course Evaluation (Leaders and Participants)

Shalom: 12 Steps to Wholeness

1. How much knowledge did you have about the Twelve-steps when you began this course? (Check one)
☐ Very little knowledge about them
☐ Familiar with some of them
☐ I have been in a Twelve-step program in the past
☐ I have been involved in another Twelve-step program during this study

2. What percentage of the classes have you attended?
☐ 80-100%
☐ 60-80%
☐ 40-60%
☐ Less than 40%

3. What percentage of the homework were you able to complete?
☐ 80-100%
☐ 60-80%
☐ 40-60%
☐ Less than 40%

4. Did this program increase your interest in practicing the Twelve Steps?
☐ Very much ☐ Some ☐ Not at all

5. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being highly unlikely and 10 being highly likely) how likely are you to continue practicing the Twelve Steps in your process of spiritual growth?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Did this program increase your interest in practicing spiritual disciplines?
☐ Very much ☐ Some ☐ Not at all

7. Check which spiritual practices are natural parts of your life at this time.

- ☐ Prayer
- ☐ Lectio Divina
- ☐ Silence
- ☐ Scriptural meditation
- ☐ Journaling
- ☐ Daily Spiritual Inventory
- ☐ Prayer of Examen
- ☐ Confession
- ☐ Blessing our Enemies
- ☐ Practicing the Presence of God
- ☐ Contemplation
- ☐ Gratitude
- ☐ Daily Bible reading
- ☐ Others (List them)

8. What were the most helpful parts for your own spiritual growth in this study?
(Check those that apply)

- ☐ Daily personal study
- ☐ Spiritual Kindergarten book
- ☐ Study Guide Questions for Reflection
- ☐ Study Guide Spiritual Discipline Exploration
- ☐ Leader's personal testimony at the beginning of class
- ☐ Small Group interactions
- ☐ Other (List them)

9. What suggestions would you make for improving future classes?

Thank you for completing this evaluation. It will be very helpful in planning future spiritual formation classes at Jupiter First Church.

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